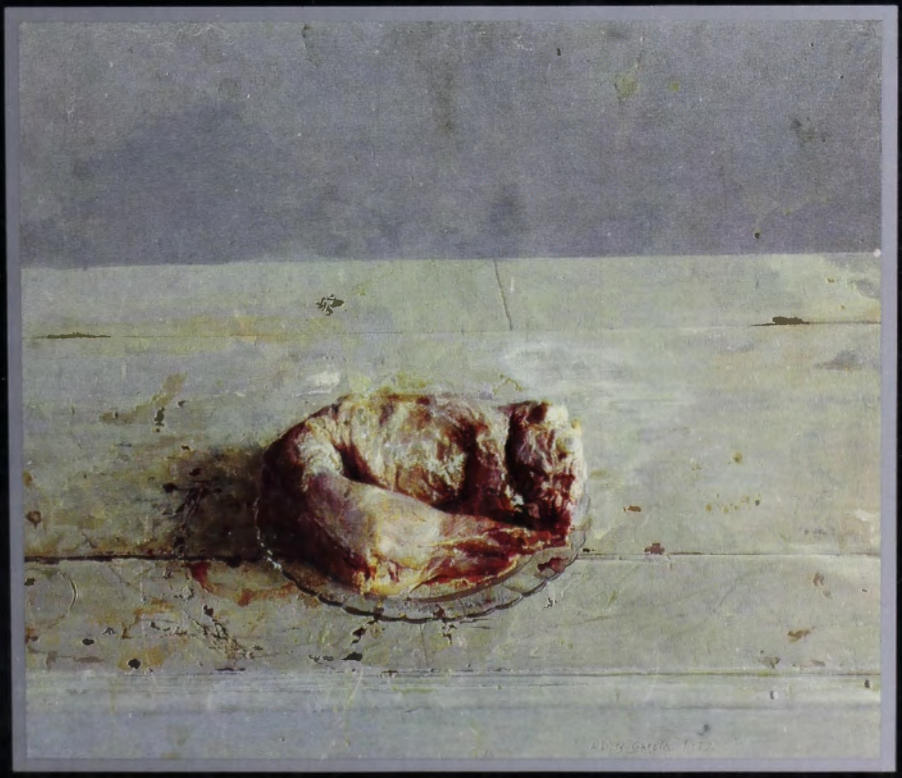
Sulfur 18

CESAR VALLEJO: FROM THE NOTEBOOKS (1929-1937)

LORINE NIEDECKER'S LETTERS TO LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MICHAEL PALMER AND IRVING PETLIN



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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti MI 48197. There is a west coast office at 11864 Idaho #5, LA 90025 CA. Subscriptions are $15 a year (3 issues) for individuals; $22 for institutions; foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3 for surface mail postage, $12 for airmail postage. Make all checks payable to SULFUR in U.S. currency. Single copy: $6. Back issues (except #1) still available at $6 each. No manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

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DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN

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Sulfur

WINTER 1987

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA / Skinned Rabbit 1972 / *Oil on Board; 53 x 60.5 cm / Color transparency courtesy of Marlborough Gallery, Inc., New York City*

Irving Petlin Artwork courtesy of Kent Fine Art, NYC

Ross Neher Artwork courtesy of Beitzel Gallery, NYC

Errata: In SULFUR #17 the correct spelling of James Gaver's name is: **James Gauer.**

Sulfur would like to thank Mr. Peter DuBois of NYC, the owner of Paul Laffoley's painting, *I, Robur Master of the World*, for permission to reproduce it on the Sulfur #17 cover.

HENRI MICHAUX: Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them is taken from Henri Michaux, *Par des traits* © Fata Morgana, 1984.

1987 issues of SULFUR are made possible in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Arts Foundation of Michigan.

CESAR VALLEJO

from the Notebooks (1929-1937)

(Translated from the Spanish by Sandra Ferdman)

The pity and mercy of men for men. If at the hour of a man's death, the pity of all men were gathered together to not let him die, that man would not die.

*

The pure and maladapted who bashes up against the world of farceurs and pickpockets.

*

The actor who one day stopped being himself to become one of the characters he played on stage.

*

Moscow's two social classes are looking for something: one by night; the other by day.

*

Religious bandits, upon being reformed all become godless.

*

A theatrical character: a blind man who says and feels tremendous things for those who have eyes.

*

His grey suit that must be worn out.

*

For the souls of the absolute, death is an atemporal misfortune, a misfortune viewed from here, there, the world, heaven, the instant and the future and the past. For materialist beings, it is no more than a misfortune viewed from this world: like being poor, falling down, making a fool of oneself, etc.

*

A theatrical character: doctor Guevara. He meets Mussolini incognito without knowing it and talks to him "sans façons."

*

A new poetics: transport Picasso's aesthetic to the poem. That is: to be aware of only that beauty which is strictly poetic, without logic, or coherence, or reason. As when Picasso paints a man and, for reasons of harmony of line and color, instead of giving him a nose, he paints in its place a box or a staircase or a glass or an orange.

*

I want my life to fall equally upon each and every one of the units (44 kilos) of my weight.

*

My meter measures two meters; my kilo weighs a ton.

*

He who coldly passes over the worker's tragedy today is not a poet. Paul Valéry, Maeterlinck, are not.

*

The man who was born old and died a child: aging backwards.

*

Laughter from tickling and laughter from moral joy. Rabelais.

*

Eyes accustomed to films and eyes accustomed to distance.

*

Intellectuals are rebels, not revolutionaries.

*

His gaze has the size of a violin at the point at which its sound dies in the distance.

*

The magic lantern leaves out many of the details of continuous and successive movement that ordinary film has, merely suggesting them by allowing us to see only a few representative movements of each movement. Divoird believes that film will revolutionize in this sense, preventing us from following step by step the continuous trajectory of a gesture or of a movement. With this we will only have a mechanical impression of the gesture.

*

The death of a person is not, as it is believed, a misfortune. The misfortune lies in something else.

*

Love liberates me in the sense that I *can* stop loving. The person I love ought to allow me the liberty to be able to hate her at any time.

*

Aviation in the air, in the water, and in the spirit. Its laws are different in each of the three cases. The spirit flies when it is heavy and sinks more into itself. The more laden the spirit, the higher and farther it flies.

*

Everything always begins at the beginning.

*

Mechanics is a medium or a discipline to realize life, but it is not life itself. It ought to lead us to life itself, which lies in the play of sentiments or rather in sensibility. Walt Whitman, Vallejo.

*

I love plants for their roots and not for their flowers.

*

The dog who out of loyalty did not allow anyone to approach his master to tend his wound. The master, naturally, died.

*

Nature creates the eternity of substance. Art creates the eternity of form.

*

No one dies except after having done something interesting. That one's done something interesting, because now he is dying.

*

The arts (painting, poetry, etc.) are not the only ones. Eating, drinking, walking are also arts: every act is an art. Slip toward dadaism.

*

My bitterness falls on Thursday.

*

It's strange: I thought that that man was me. He looks exactly like me. So much so that when I turned my head, I was almost sure that he was me and I almost crashed into myself.

*

The same road that carries away, also brings.

*

"My technique continuously evolves" according to Mariátegui. Like the industrial technique and rationalization of Ford.

*

One copies an automobile design and the imitator is tried and pays damages. One copies a poem and nothing happens. In Europe, they do something, but it is infinitely small and insignificant.

*

Artistically, *socialism* is not the same as *humanism*.

*

The only one who tells the truth is a liar.

*

When I read, it seems I am looking at myself in a mirror.

*

Ça va la pluie?
Le mois de mai est le plus antipathique del mundo.

[How ya doin, rain?
The month of May is the most disagreeable in the world.]

*

My glasses have stopped (like a watch).

*

Spinoza seems disguised as himself, as Spinoza.

*

Je m'aperçois bien qu'en ce moment on mange dans mon coeur.

[Right now I feel them eating in my heart.]

*

I want to write a little note to everyone telling them that's fine!

*

He says: Be serious so they'll do what you ask.
And I say to him: They'll do it not because I'm serious, but because what I ask is just.

*

I feel how my nails grow.

*

I feel how my beard grows in my sleep.

*

It is a theoretical and practical cold.

*

I wrote a poem in which I spoke of an adjective from which grass was growing. Some years later, in Paris, I saw on a stone in the Montparnasse cemetery an adjective with grass. Prophecy of poetry.

*

The portrait of every person is always found in the bathroom.

*

In the cold air smoke rose from the mouth of a person who was talking and from the fresh shit of a dog.

*

The advantage of film lies in our seeing the actors face to face, while they do not see us.

*

A passer-by says:
– Take 5 soles.
– Thank you. No.
– Take them, please!
Etc., etc.

*

Everyone is a hero in some way.

*

My simple anarchy, my great sorrow composed of joys.

*

I owe you 20 francs; lend me 5 and I'll owe you 15. O.K.?

*

He's going to shit, so he puts on his eyeglasses.

*

He's going to the bathroom, so he puts on his glasses.

*

To write a poem: "Sirs: I have the honor to tell you that I am quite well...."

And then relate the state of my "affaires" and the rest.

*

Listening to Beethoven, a woman and a man cry at the greatness of that music. And I tell them: but it is you who have the greatness in your heart.

*

A new aesthetic: short poems, multiform, about evocative moments or anticipations, like "L'Opérateur" in Vertof's film.

*

Rewrite the poems: "Lucas died, my brother-in-law, etc." and "My Self-Portrait."

*

"Revue Hebdomadaire" publie (Déc. 1934) Chaplín par Clara Goll, à base des souvenirs d'une femme de Chaplín. On y voit combien Chaplín est différent de Charlot. Il faut lire ça.

["Revue Hebdomadaire" (Dec. 1934) has Chaplin by Clara Goll, based on the memories of one of Chaplin's wives. One sees there how much Chaplin differs from Charlot. A must-read.]

*

Un camelot débite sa marchandise–l'éloquence populaire et l'esprit de la foire. Scene à traiter dans "Vestiaire."

[A peddler peddles his wares–popular eloquence and the spirit of the marketplace. Scene to be played in "Vestiare."]

*

Everyone runs from their own thoughts. He who goes down the stairs, gets on a train, walks down the street, etc., what he's doing is running from his thoughts.

*

The Metropolitan Pierre, successor to the Patriarch Thakou, and present head of the Russian Orthodox church, is in harmony with the Soviet. The Russian priest émigrés have placed themselves under the authority of Constantinople's patriarch. A kind of schism in the bosom of the Russian church.

*

The spot or place or landscape or road of the world, where no one has ever gone and nothing has ever happened.

*

Le petit Prince Paul amené à une parade militaire, en tant qu'éritier du trône, pousa des cris d'épouvante è la vue des soldats, des chevaux, des tanks, etc.

[The little Prince Paul brought to a military parade, as heir to the throne, cried out with fear upon seeing the soldiers, horses, tanks, etc.]

*

The boy who said, pointing to his mother's genitals: mommy, you have hair here.

The mother slapped him: whack! don't be fresh.

The boy saw, however, something that exists and his knowledge was broken and contradicted by his own mother, in whose word he had complete faith.

This is the root of the social farce and of the failures of history and of the struggles among men.

*

A new theatrical aesthetic: a play in which the author, together with his family and relatives, lives with the characters he has created, and they take part in his daily life, his interests and passions. Either they don't know or they confuse the theatrical characters with the living people of reality.

*

Love and the character of lovers. The modern tragedy between the rights of men and those of women.

*

Perhaps the Indo-American tone in the style and in the soul?

*

Be careful with the human substance of poetry!

*

Decomposition or vivisection of the process of creating a poem.

*

The husband and wife are arguing: even if we were in paradise, you'd try to hog the best seat. Madame Jhal. Comical.

*

If life isn't going to be pretty,
then let them eat it all.

*

The man who never cried once in his 80 years of life.

*

Spain's lack of understanding of South American writers who, out of fear, did not dare to be Indoamericans, but were almost totally Spanish. (Rubén Darío and others.)
Lorca is Andalusian. Why don't I have the right to be Peruvian? So that they'll tell me they don't understand me in Spain? I, or an Austrian or an Englishman, can understand the pure-blooded stylistic turns of Lorca and Co.

*

A man recalls his happy past and recounts his successes to another who recalls a painful past and recounts his failures one by one. A terrible contrast in dialogue.

*

A visit to the cemetery Sunday, November 7, 1937, with Georgette. The conversation begins with G.'s selfishness — dialectic of selfishness-altruism —. We go on to dialectics in general. I mention *Trilce*

and its dialectical axis of mathematical order — 1-2-0 — "Scales": or instrument and knowledge: the dialectical rigor of the objective and subjective world. Its greatness and misery or impotence.

I refer to Hegel and Marx, who did not create but discovered the dialectical law. I go on to myself whose position goes beyond the simple observance of this law and comes to be suspicious of it and takes a critical and revolutionary attitude to this dialectical determinism. Then I think about Pascal, whose thought figures, without a doubt, among those who inspired a greater dialectical velocity, passing from materialism or scientism (its physics), to philosophy, then to metaphysics, then to religion, then to Christianity, and, finally, to Catholicism.

We arrive at the cemetery reciting my verse: "To be a poet until one is no longer a poet," and the other one "the enormous quantity of money it costs to be poor."

The tomb of her mother. The contemplation of death, from the biological and vital point of view (mother, lover, the nine months and mother afterwards, outside the womb).

Autumn — Dry Leaves — Cold — Return —.

A cat at the foot of the church leads to a discussion of legendary animals. Anecdotes from the book about the female cat who raised little chickens, the lion and the slave, the cat and the dove he devoured after licking its wounds, because of the smell of its blood.

I think about my cat who, sitting on the table, intervened in a poem I was writing, stopping my pen with his paw following the flow of my writing. It was the cat who wrote the poem.

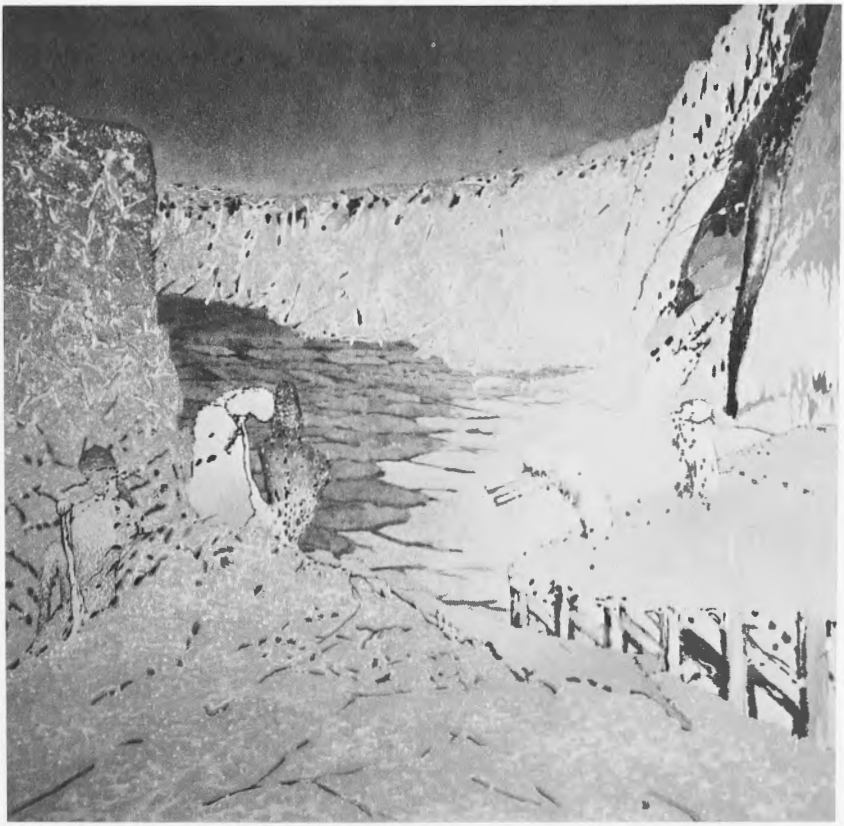
Then I think about Verlaine and his poem to his "I".

— Is it better to say "I"? Or better to say "the man" as the subject of the emotion — lyric and epic —. Of course, it is deeper and more poetic to say "I" — taken naturally as a symbol of "everyone" —.

Upon leaving the cemetery, we see a crucifix on a tomb and we talk of the Christian "hope" in the beyond: the tremendous creation of Jesus, born from the greatest depths of human sorrow — After the war it must have produced an enormous renaissance in the Christian conception of man's destiny. Etc.

IRVING PETLIN

Six Paintings

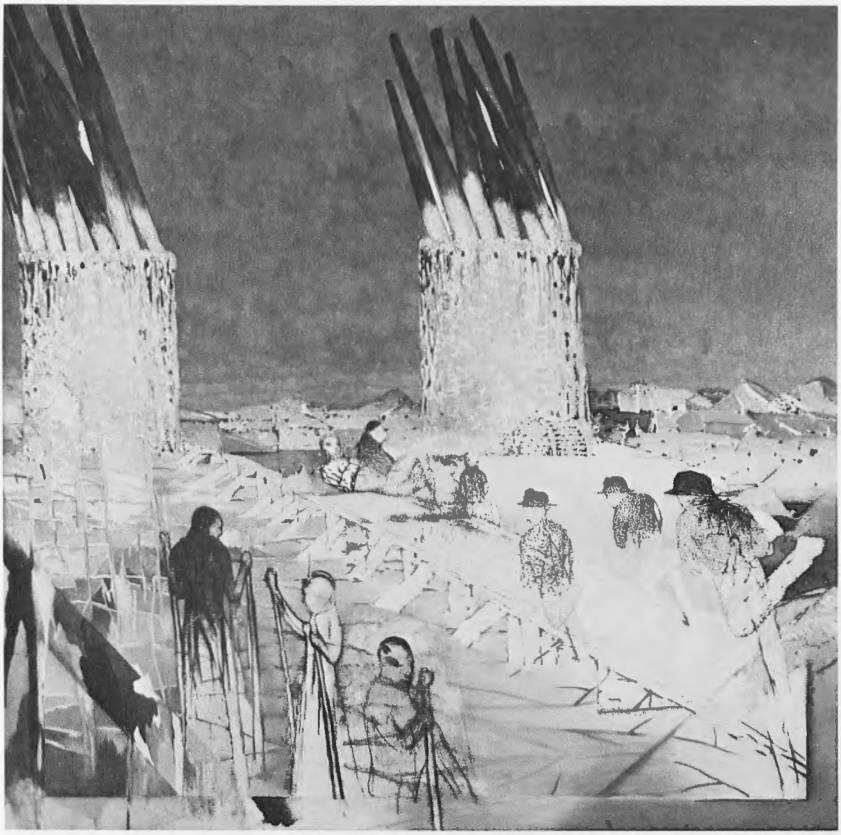


LE DEPART

Oil on Canvas / 48" x 48" / 1975

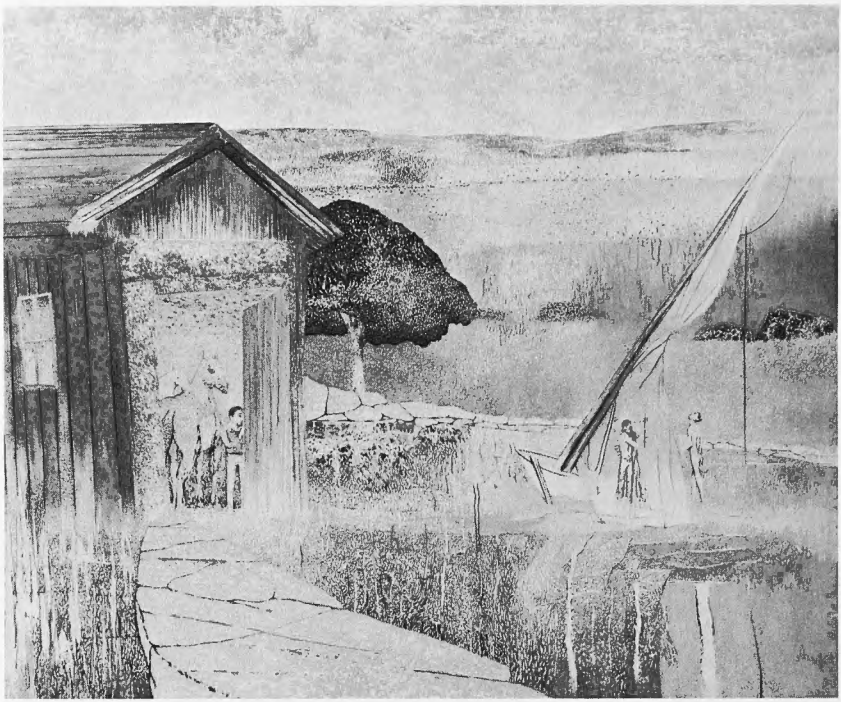
NEW STONE RING
Oil on Canvas / 1975

BIRTH TIDE
Oil on Canvas / 1975



WHERE DAMEN ENDS / 1977-81

ABRAHAM'S WAGON . . . (CORTEZ)
Oil on Canvas / 44" x 44" / 1985



THE FARMER RON AGNEW
Oil on Canvas / 78" x 96" / 1985

IRVING PETLIN & MICHAEL PALMER

The Rightness to be Depicted

M. We might begin[1] by looking at what, in a recent interview, you seem to be elaborating as a poetics of painting. When you use words like "periodicity," "relation" and "repetition" you're using terms that cross with those often associated with the poetics of writing as well, and I was wondering if you could elaborate a little further on your sense of how these things operate in your work.

I. In the interview you refer to,[2] I was describing a kind of young revelation related to my seeing for the first time the work of Van Gogh. On that occasion the things that I was trying to understand about drawing were suddenly kind of blasted into my brain by an encounter with the Van Gogh show–after years of working in the basement of the Art Institute studios and children's classes, and not understanding the relationship between what I was doing downstairs and what was going on in the galleries upstairs, because I never visited them. I did so, and it was the Van Gogh show, and it was during that moment of the Van Gogh show in the years, perhaps 1948, 1947, that I recognized an aspect of making art that would probably stay with me for the rest of my life. And that is the surface itself. The thing made is a network. It's not a simple flatness or a simple shaping. It's a material. And it's a material which within itself is like a microcosm, a networking of pieces and nodules and framework and so forth. It's that which I saw immediately in Van Gogh, the fact that everything that existed, everything that his eye looked on, everything that was peered at, everything he tried to assume, could not come to him simply. It had to come with this baggage and burden of multiple marks, multiple choices, many nervous movements and agitated increments in order for it to be just *simply* the symbol or representative of what he was looking for.

M. So in a sense it's saying that things don't signify in isolation. You can't simply "pluck" something, but in fact they signify entirely in relation, through a network of correspondences. Would that be . . .

I. Yes. For example, when I think of the modernist line, that is from Matisse to Elsworth Kelly, there is a beauty and a grace and a loveliness to it, and a kind of summary of the world. I also recognize the moment I see that, that that's not the way I see the world. And I knew this very early on. Whether that's a burden or a gift I'm not certain, but I knew that very early. *That* summary was not my task. My task was to go into the material itself and create its nuclear structure, in the sense of the dot, line, tactile pattern of the thing described. That it was not its contour or its grace in space but its *impregnated presence* I was looking for.

M. "Signifying capacity" in a certain way.

I. Yeah. The, in a sense, rightness. The rightness to be depicted.

M. It seems also that is part of what your career represents–a resistance to decoration in the easiest sense, a resistance to art as decor, with the attendant effort to build a structured meaning, a structured meaning that in itself resists appropriation.

I. I've often wondered why I feel so compelled to work a subject or a form to that point where it in its own right receives light, has neighbors, has a geography within the picture, has a topography and a gravity and a weight, as well as a color and a light. In a sense the question always is, wouldn't it be easier *not* to be concerned with the completeness of an imagery . . . After all, it's still something invented, something in a sense plucked from the mind and not from nature itself. Why, and yet there has never been a way for me not to depict in this way. This is the depicted spirit that inhabits the work, and it's a labor which is a given. It's no longer a question for me. I used to wonder a lot more about it than I do now. Now I just simply accept it as the way I work.

M. It could be that that would be one reason you've found it necessary to work in a series over time, because, from this geography of the imagination you construct, there's always more to be found in a given area. It's in a certain way inexhaustible, and it's there to be read over and over.

I. Right. And the single picture is never the fullest extent possible. There are certain pictures that are unique in themselves, that have within them the whole. But that's rare. I think more typical would be the series which covers a "region." In one of Kafka's great stories, I think it's "The Bucket Rider," after this poor soul has failed to find more than a few coals he–in a sense it's a description of his death. Death by freezing. Kafka's description. "And with that I ascend into the regions of the ice mountains and am lost forever." That's a phrase that stuck with me all my life from the time I read it, because in a way when I think of an idea of a place it is as if I'm seeing it from the region of the ice mountains. I'm looking from that perspective. Whether I work large or small, we're always looking at a region of the ice mountains and in a way that's what I described earlier. Maybe it's a burden or a gift, but that's how I see.

M. That also implies working from a situation of loss. That is, beginning with very reduced means and working from there. I mean that story, to pick that one, the content of that story also implies that. And it's also very significant, it seems to me, that in the complex mix of roots that your work derives from it would also be a tale out of that particular Middle European cultural tradition which would continue to signify.

I. When I was younger I didn't find the connection between my own history and the history of my own family and my own work to be so. . . In other words, my self-knowledge was insufficient to understand how consistent was the pattern that had set itself into motion very early on. As if you watch for a very long time a merry-go-round. It's incomprehensible, largely, except when it slows down there are parts of it that you begin to see . . . and then somewhere in mid-life one begins to actually see, the merry-go-round has slowed sufficiently so one can actually see all the intact lines that connect such a simple choice. For example, this particular image and the whole history of my own family which is an immigrant family, a first-born life. The life of the first-born in a new place with all of its built-in insecurities regarding permanence, questions of security, questions of belonging in a world which seems so alien on so many levels, religious, economic and political. But little by little the story or others like it and the nature of the work all begin to connect. Perhaps it may have been ten years ago when I began to see the lines that take me back. They correspond to the history of my own family, the history of my own life. That those choices were made sort of like Bacon

said when someone asked him why his painting was so viciously rendered in a kind of torn way. He said, "Well, Iwas wounded very young, and it took me my whole life to develop the technique to render it." You see, in a way it's not that I'm saying that there was a wound, but that there was a disruption in a cultural pattern of which I was the recipient.

M. There was a fracture.

I. That's right. There was a fracture.

M. And you operate within that fracture.

I. That's right.

M. But you don't artificially close that fracture.

I. That's right. That's right.

M. It seems in an interesting way too. . . and this is possibly something our work has in common . . . that there's a great deal of autobiographical material, and yet it's not the telling in some literal sense of a story. It's as if the narrative were implied or suggested by the accretion of referential elements. So that you get the sense of it being personal, so to speak, and deeply felt, but at the same time it's not a question of what we would think of as the autobiographical genre. The story itself seems to exist in that fracture and to be in a certain way unspeakable. And so you have to find these other approaches. Is that fair to say?

I. That's fair to say. The approach is what is constantly changing. The fracture remains constant. The fracture is the permanent part of personality. The approach is experimental. Not in its twentieth-century sense. Experimental in the sense . . .

M. Exploratory.

I. Exploratory in the true sense of experimental. That is, one tries to see from a changed perspective, or perhaps in certain cases from a more intense view, the same material over and over. If the word "repetition" entered . . . this is a very good and likely place for it to enter, because repetition, reiteration, is a way of refining the view by changing by centimeters only the perspective of the "ledge" from which you're peering down into the subject matter. Nonetheless that slight change alters a great deal of the way in which it can be seen and illuminated.

M. It's as though "experiment" were being used in the sense of the nineteenth-century laboratory, where you would set up an experiment, working with tools that are probably unthinkable now, buckets, little jars and so on. A one-to-one relationship with these things. Over time you would change the relationship, the ratio, of this thing and that thing in the dish until something emerged that you could know. And it seems very much that kind of intense looking and trying again and looking again until whatever is the secret of this thing, the solution, begins to be articulated. Maybe it's a good time too to begin to talk about the recurrent figures which have always fascinated me because they are essentially inexplicable and yet profoundly meaningful at multiple levels. I'm referring to the rowers and the dustblowers, and more recently the burning boat that has come into the work. The green chair. I'm interested in, if it's possible to speak of, the origins of these things. How they come to be meaningful in the work. Because I see a lot of, in contemporary painting and poetry equally, arbitrary insertion or contrivance of an image for effect, pulled from nowhere and placed in the work in the hope that it will create sensation or have meaning *per se.* Maybe sometimes that can be a mode of procedure, but it seems to me that you work in a very different territory that's accretive and from which somehow images arise.

I. "Accretive" is a good descriptive word because the dustblowers and the rowers, the early figures which were continuously present from the early '60s on, are creatures which do represent . . . they're the philosophical underpinnings of the work in the sense

that they do limn the creature that must represent the way I think. The rower never rows on water in any of my pictures. The rower is called the rower and yet I can't think of a single picture where the rower is actually rowing on water. The rower is always rowing on dry land or in dust or in cracked fields or in a highway of stone and rock. The rower is the quintessential struggle against the given, the thing as is, the world as is, the history, the sediment that we call our time. And the rower is the struggler against that. The rower suggests very early to me the kind of person who–unlike a glistening, accepting, co-opting entity–the gritty creature who views his own period in time and carries with him all its horror and all its cruelty and yet moves on, and yet survives, and yet continues. The early depictions of the rower were all two-sticked figures, a person walking, generally with two sticks. There were other rowers that succeeded which seemed to be single-sticked figures, poling figures. But the earliest were double-sticked figures. I think that's the more primitive version, because it was closer to the mark in the inventive sense of the creature who works against the ground-reality of his own period and time and is not humbled by it or beaten or defeated, but is nonetheless marked. It is not a happy figure. He never was, or she, as a creature, an exultant figure, but was always a persistent one. If any phrase could describe the nature of the figure, it would be that it always moved and continued to dominate the picture, the space. Even if it was a tiny figure in a large landscape, the sightliness of the picture, the way it was put together architecturally, always led you to a contemplation of what this figure was doing. Even though it was doing very little it was *present*, and that's the way I feel it was meant. That's what it was meant to *represent*.

M. And again the notion of "accretive," in that these signs that come to be in the painting seem to acquire greater and greater meaning across the experience of their reappearances, so that their meaning modifies, but it also contains the previous meanings. Just as in poetry, for example, as a poet's system of signs comes into play across the duration of the work, at first there's almost an arbitrary feeling of not being sure what they mean. You begin to learn what they mean by initially trusting to their appearance and then learning to read them yourself, what they have to say.

I. I quite agree that there is a real analogy here, because when the figures begin to look like the landscape that they were traversing, in a sense the same cracked organization, the same kind of fractured organization began to be the characteristic figure. They

simply were sucking up the land they were moving over, and it was being transformed into their very person. Unlike Arcimboldi (I'm not sure how that jumped into my head), the making up of a figure of vegetables, these were creatures made up of minerals and the irradiated earth they were moving across. And in a way that was never a conscious decision on my part, it was simply a result of what you mentioned as being the role, the repeating gesture, the gesture of letting a figure run again through the page or through the surface, and watching how it takes on its own history and in a sense creates its own history over time. Only *that* way creates certain kinds of twentieth-century imagery. The kind of art that produces flash imagery that results from photography, advertising, and so forth, is not the same thing. And the artist whose origins lie in those worlds, in the worlds of reproduction that come with the camera, could not produce a figure like that. Nor could I produce a figure like them. That's where I'm really separate. I've never worked off of that kind of world. It's the world of grinding out one's psychology into material that I have been practicing, not the other.

M. A lot of the tension in those figures seems to arise in a way that extends too to your later "landscapes," which is to say that there is a character of the commonplace (granted that, paradoxically, the strange or even bizarre is often noticed first). I mean the rower, the sailboat, or the barn which has entered your work in an interesting way in recent years. It's the character of what one can see around one at a given place all the time. But then also the character of the unseeable, of the thing which is an entirely interiorized element that comes to meet this otherwise relatively representational thing. And it seems a tension throughout the work, such that we look at some of the later landscapes, for example, if we can call them that provisionally, and they're at once recognizable and nonexistent, except as they come to be on the canvas. It's interesting in the complex history of your own learning process there was the intercourse with the Surrealists, and yet finally this is a very different thing from the surrealist image. One can see a kind of learning from there, just as one can see a learning from there among many other American painters who don't resemble you. But finally what emerges as metaphor, whatever it may want to be called, has a strikingly different semantic resonance and presence, both painterly and in terms of how it means throughout the work. Which is why I think the too easy assessments of people from their origins tend to miss the point of what they arrive at, tend to become facile explanations. Yet it is interesting to look also at the diversity of

your sources. You've named Van Gogh, De Kooning, Francis Bacon, Odilon Redon, et al, as well. It's not a simple picture. And we could bring in German Expressionism, I suppose. It's a very complex melding which in its own way is curiously American in its multiplicity of references and uses.

I. Even as I looked out at the prospect of being an artist, you know, thirty years ago, I recognized very quickly how this period was different from all the time that preceded, because we could not *not* know everything. You couldn't go ahead and make pictures and say I didn't know such a picture existed or had been done by somebody at another time. We were given a privilege and a burden all at the same time, and the privilege was to know pretty much everything, if one was really persistent and intense; and at the same time the burden was, what then was there left to do? And in fact I felt there was a lot to do. And I still feel that way. But I don't feel that one could go ahead and practice an art without knowing all that one could know about what it has really shaped and formed and taken from. In the early fifties in art school, I was part of a group of young people who all felt this way. We were already a separate group from our colleagues in that we were shaping our own work not out of a narrow bin that happened to be Chicago 1952, 1953, but at that time we were very interested in the Surrealists, and the interest remained very strong until my visit to France in the late fifties, early sixties, when in fact I began to show in the same gallery with some of the Surrealists and began to know them. But my interest in the Surrealists waned at that very moment, because in a way I recognized there was a fundamental difference, not only generational, but a fundamental difference in the way we saw the world and the way our work was invested with the properties of the world and human experience, including our own autobiographical selves. The Surrealists struck me at the time as being more synthetic than I had understood to be the case. There was much more posturing and taking of stances and positions for the sake of an onlooker or being onlookers themselves. Being an onlooker to your own work. Whereas I felt a much more primitive urge to go to the roots of what was my own experience and not be, in a sense, burdened by the theatrics, you might say, of production and positioning *vis à vis* the art world and *vis à vis* contemporary fashion.

M. Their obsessions with strategies, publicity, and so on.

I. Right. And that was what could only come from, in this case, the privilege of having been there at the time Max Ernst was still working. Even Giacometti was no longer a Surrealist, my contact with Giacometti was extremely rewarding.

M. In the midst of that, if I may interrupt for a second, you can see why Giacometti was no longer a Surrealist, because it seems to me he had to make the same kind of withdrawal and re-evaluation of what the meaning of the work was. It would have had nothing to do with all that, even though his surrealist works are extraordinary.

I. Wonderful. Extraordinary. Yes, exactly, exactly. But Paris at that time was for me very much a continuation of what I had started to do. Very much also a kind of re-evaluation of what the early impulses had been and what the early heroes might have seemed like from a distance. The near and up close view began to change what I was starting to think of as this brief moment in time and history. My own personality began to emerge. At the very time that I was welcomed by these people into their midst, I was in every sense of the word the ungrateful young American. (Laughter.)

M. It's very striking to me, because as you know I've been translating these essays and talks of surrealist poets on painting and collage, and a couple of things have struck me in not a good sense. One of them being the manipulation of rhetoric in the form of address to the audience. And the other is a certain degree of superficiality in relation to painting itself and collage itself. With an eye to, in an almost militaristic way, forcing a position and making a headline. So I found the work obviously provocative for that moment in time, and one doesn't deny the significance; and yet at this point rather thin and not in any way truly observant of the state of that art at that particular moment. Giving impetus (certainly unintentionally) to what was to follow, a kind of avant-gardism that is more style than substance. The seeds of it being there, though I still admire Ernst and many of the other painters for their ultimate accomplishment. You can see very clearly, in retrospect, the seeds of a certain ambition which seems now to have exploded. This would also have to do, I suppose, with the fact that in your work, rather than images being imposed or synthesized, put together using chance and other methods, they are emergent from what you said is a psychic landscape, as an interiorized understanding of things. Getting on to the sense of landscapes, obviously there's the play of

interior and exterior in them as well. One of the things that's fascinated me about some of the recent work at the Marlborough show late last winter is a play on the pastoral mode, a coming to understand . . . There's almost a haunted pastoral character. You seem to represent both what pastoral attempted to embody and the impossibility of that, all at once. Is that something you can elaborate on?

I. Yes. I'm thinking of what in the last few years I was trying to do, and the Vineyard has played a very important role, that coming here each summer, becoming tuned to light and foliage. I'm a person who comes from the desert in my work. That is, from dry landscape to a lush place where water and foliage are present in abundance. You mentioned the haunted pastoral. What I wanted to find was how this world which is present and so vulnerable and tangential to the real world could be depicted in a way that would imply it's fragility, almost dreamlike, as if it's a vapor which could disappear in a moment. How to make agriculture and the sea meet, and in a way "The Farmer Ron Agnew" is that picture. It's the most specific depiction of the sea meeting agriculture in a romantic embrace, which I find to be a great moment in my own world. That is, to feel how beauty could actually exist in a singular place, an actual place. But at the same time to be so frightened for its fragility, its . . .

M. Transitoriness?

I. Transitoriness, and that it's available to only a small number of people who happen to be lucky enough, or whatever, to have passed through at the right moment with the right means. And I find that so special in its own way. In effect, the pastoral pictures are the most Seurat-like in the break-up of color, as if it's about to break apart, you see. No pictures are as broken as these last pictures in terms of points of light and color, as if it's about to decompose as quickly as it composed itself. In a way I made it so, because that's how I had meant to signify its fragility. I believe the work is now probably heading away from that. But the point was, I guess up until the last show which contains the pictures that really express this, I was heading towards wanting to bring this union together and at the same time show it to be so capable of being decomposed. As if the points of color on the canvas could head for the other side and simply leave the void that is constant.

M. You've also spoken to me about the Renaissance martyr pictures and the influence they once had, where you see this landscape and in it an event curiously reduced in scale.

I. That's true. That kind of picture has always been haunting. The picture in which the saints were beheaded in these glades, these gorgeous places, or else pierced with arrows, or in some way mutilated in the midst of this immense wooded forest. It's always been a curious idea, because it doesn't sound and represent and feel like the world we live in. It's a very contemporary idea. We live in the midst of some extraordinary beauty and extraordinary time. At the same time, the bestiality that characterizes our time just continues in crevices and corners. It's some kind of reality that I don't know how to deal with.

M. It seems, and particularly now in the Reagan years, the paradox of our own, of the American reality, one that is probably materially more abundant, let's say, certainly not richer, but more abundant than at any time in the past. And, therefore, one can hide in that materiality. One can create enclaves that have nothing to do with what is literally happening in the world. The Reagan years seem to me a willful forgetting, a turning away toward a, you could call it a suburban reality, though it isn't exclusively that.

I. Actually, Sarah put it very well. Sarah, my wife, said the Reagan years have given people the *permission* to be selfish, self-centered, completely self-involved and *mean* to people who have less. And it has given them *permission* to feel this without guilt and without fear or worry that someone will look down upon them for feeling this. It's a very good characterization of the kind of psychology that these people have put out into the atmosphere of this country in the years they have been in power. People do not fear being *racist*. The next step is they don't fear *killing* large numbers of people for an abstract idea which has no bearing on the . . . That's the kind of permissiveness . . .

M. In a sense, it seems to me a recovery of ignorance from the knowledge that was beginning to come in the post-Vietnam years which was a very, very important knowledge about American imperial potential. Potential cruelty, actual cruelty, and an evidence of

what those abstractions can lead to. And now there seems to me a very deliberate and programmatic *coup de torchon,* a wiping the slate clean.

I. That's right. One of the programmatic aspects of the Reagan years has been to get rid of the Vietnam allergy, just like the Japanese came out of World War II with an atomic allergy. They could not ever rearm and become involved with nuclear weaponry. The Reagan people really talked about, openly, getting rid of the Vietnam allergy and in a sense taking the United States out of history again, just like we were pre-Vietnam. And Vietnam gave us a taste of what it felt like to be a loser. To be an aggressor but then to end up being a victim of your own aggression. And in a way that was the history that most cultures have experienced and why they have a bit of wisdom, if they have. This country was given that kind of wisdom with the Vietnam War. And the Reagan people programmatically have tried to change that and get rid of that allergy and return us to that state of being outside history. I think that's what characterizes it: militarize the options.

M. You just brought up the necessity of not removing oneself. I was struck by your comment to David Shapiro (in the Marlborough catalogue) that you had not depicted the Holocaust because you had not felt, I forget the exact words, you had not felt you knew how to do it at a certain point. One of the things that struck me was that, to me, there seemed to be a way that you were always depicting it, at least taking it as an altering fact. As a stoppage in time which made whatever landscape and whatever figure you portrayed after that moment different. It seems to me in that respect maybe you are depicting it in the only way that it's possible to depict it–in its unspeakable nature.

I. I quite agree with what you're saying, that there has been a tingeing or a singeing of every figure because of that fact. And yet there are still territories that I would like to enter and try to more specifically aim at or focus on the question of something as momentous and separate as that. I may or may not get to it, because it may prove to be that what I have done at various times is, as you say, the only way to do it. But I'm still waiting for that "ledge" to lead to something that will more directly engage me. I'm not sure when that will come, but I'm holding myself, literally, in readiness for that

possibility. There have been some thoughts on my part about the "Abraham's Wagon," the image of "Abraham's Wagon" which is, after all, just my grandfather's horse in Chicago. As children we rode it, and it was a sort of thing that I carry with me, and my brother carried with him, and my younger brother carried with him as one of the most marvelous of our younger experiences. I analyzed recently the architecture of all the "Abraham's Wagons," and they correspond *exactly* to the photographs the Germans took of the exodus of Warsaw. The streets, the angles, the horse coming up the street, the way in which you see it, *exactly* replicate the angle of the bringing of the Jews out of Warsaw. The famous photographs in the Stroop Archive at the New York Institute . . .

M. That's what I immediately saw in looking at that series, that it was an enfolding of autobiographical fact with this other "fact" that is in a sense "pre-memory" for you, prior, a representation that extends beyond the remembered into a deeper, historical memory. And that these two in an interesting way, in the character of your human experience, are coincident. That one cannot remove one from the other to be true to whatever memory is. One cannot censor . . . memory . . . I certainly don't mean either Jungian or "racial" memory, but I mean in the historical sense that memory is cumulative. And therefore in your work a multiplicity of temporal dimensions is embodied. This is true also in what we speak of as your portraits, where one figure from the present will often merge with another, ancestral figure. There's no single, separate reality. Maybe that brings us back to your very early observation regarding Van Gogh, that things are not isolated, they they signify in relation. I'd like at this point to give you a quote. I've always been interested in the way you imply narrative by working in the margins of narrative, by leaving the story that is present essentially untold, there for the viewer to recount to him or herself. This suggests a certain proximity to the work of the poet Edmond Jabès in *The Book of Questions*, where he is recounting the occasion of exile, the occasion of post-Holocaust experience, and leaving the thing at the heart unspoken. I wonder if you would be interested in commenting on a quotation from an interview[3] with him:

> If the Jew is "the other," it is because by trying to be, at any price, himself, he is each time *more*, a being from nowhere. That is where his difference, and the distance at which he maintains himself, is inscribed.
>
> I would even go as far as saying that this *more*–which is, in fact a *less* as it is an emptiness that always has to be

> filled–is his only difference. The lack is the source of his questioning.
>
> That is also why his gaze cannot stop at the level of the simple appearances. To his eyes these are never more than a stage. It is as if he had a second gaze widening the visual field excessively and giving credit to the idea that behind every reality there lies an even more tangible reality. It is by this always unsatisfied gaze that Jews recognize each other.

In other words, that seems in part to address the nature of the type of image we are trying to define here, that comes to be in your work.

I. In a way, the kind of life that characterized the European Jew is implicit in the nature of the other. The other is also a world within a world. The Jew always lived as a world within another world, and that went on for centuries and centuries and centuries. The development of a completely self-enclosed reality of logic and law and morals, religious practice and so forth, within another culture is an incubator for the kind of mind that burst out in the twentieth-century when this world was exploded and Jews ventured into one much larger–both in Europe and the United States. The result was that a mind that had been focussing on an convoluting reality within another larger reality suddenly was free to think about *reality*, period. The result was, I think, the Jewish mind confronted a great dilemma. If it was a mind involved in the making of word-pictures, poetry and prose, then the creature who emerges in my mind as the perfect writer is Kafka, the perfect example of the self-enclosed creature being exposed to the outside, and then finding his resources are a mind-set that was formed a long time ago. For the visual artist the problem was different. Already being a first generation creature (that is, the Diaspora has led over water to another place separated by a lot of time and space), only the accident of growing up in a gentile environment made me think, quickly and for my own safety and preservation, about the nature of the other, of being the other in the midst of another culture. The very fact that my own neighborhood duplicated the European experience in America was crazily crucial, even though it could have been quite different; but it did emphasize what was in fact a "known" to me very early on: that there was a sense of being the other within a larger context which was *still* not the majority culture. I guess that moment in growing up in its own way reinforced what were undoubtedly instincts in that direction, and that's how I would respond to it. I would recognize what he said.

M. There seems to me a significant conjunction between your first consciousness of your own art and the fact of the Second World War, the mass destruction of cities, the Holocaust. Along with the Final Solution there was apocalypse as represented by the nuclear bomb. Both of those events represent, in their ways, the end of time. That does seem to signal the end of the "modern" in the sense in which Michel Foucault talks about the "modern," which is to say that moment in the middle of the nineteenth-century when Baudelaire and others look at the modern world and try to penetrate what the modern representation is. They use the word "modern" to stand for "presentness" in a new way. This begins immediately to be embodied in that art which is meant to be at once *of* and *out of* its time. They are looking at the things of that . . . Baudelaire observing the dark waistcoats of Paris pedestrians, the people "in mourning," as he puts it; and wondering at the hallucinatory quality of the actual. You seem to come out of Chicago (I'm remembering the observation that you made) at this time when the "modern" is no longer "fact" in the same way. That you are given this dubious gift of having available all these different times, so that the artist is no longer "in the moment" quite as the artist could have been before. Yet, this seems very interestingly to be not only an artistic problem, but a problem *of* the world itself. A conjoining. In other words, that's not simply to my mind an aesthetic apprehension on your part, but also an historical apprehension about what it is to be in a world that comes after the modern. This relates to something I've noticed. I haven't seen all that much of the critical literature concerning your work, but I don't think anyone has quite come to understand the degree to which you have looked at the progress of American painting during the fifties, and the degree to which certain aspects of it are ingrained in your technique. Perhaps the fact that your work is not identifiable as part of a school or trend, people have not seen what you derived even from the Action Painters. The marks of that learning can be found all over the work. That's more or less, than a question, but maybe you could just take that last part.

I. One of the distinguishing marks of somebody who is not an American realist is that I've never felt that the choices were between abstraction and the study of nature. That seems to be an unfocussed choice. If the twentieth-century is about anything, it's not about an emptiness of subject, nor is it about a fullness of rendered subject matter. It seems to me it's about our minds taking a role; artists are intellectuals, they're not mechanics and they just don't produce empty or blank works on the one hand, nor do they produce

simply labors of virtuoso rendition. It seems to me the real territory to be explored, given our experience, given the history of our time, given the moment, was that one had to take reality, what was there, the remnants of it, and abstraction, and make an art of it. That was the problem. Not one or the other. The problem was how do you bring these two factors into play so that a mythology of recognition and revelation is possible. Not either realism or abstraction, but something that was beaten out of those two elements. That's what I set out to do, basically. And in a way that's why I've never been considered wholly an American artist. I'm always somewhere in the mid-Atlantic, because the poetics that are involved in that kind of transformation do not appeal to an American audience, by and large. Just as in the period of Abstract Expressionism during the sixties I almost chose not to show in New York, since it seemed that I could not get a fair hearing because of the nature of what I was doing. It just looked ridiculous to the contemporary art world of that period. I continued to show in Europe, even though I was living in New York starting in 1966.

M. Up to a point though, it does seem paradoxically useful *not* to have been understood and absorbed, in that we've seen so much decay from the moment of resistance in American painting. On through the fifties it did maintain, at its best, a rather heroic capacity of resistance. I mean an effort by those painters who came to their work in the late thirties and early forties to resist what the culture was coming to represent. Then, perhaps inevitably, came the appropriation of that generation, its recovery as propaganda for the American Way. And of course the commoditization of that work, its acceptance into the salons and board rooms, and the astounding prices. And certain of them began to grow accustomed to that position, with the marked exception of those artists who went about their business and others who suffered greatly in the event. I think of Philip Guston, for example, maintaining an effort of real focus on the work, whatever it demanded. In his case it demanded that he give up all that they asked him to continue reproducing– mechanically reproducing, as Walter Benjamin might put it. It seems that, now that you have (we hope) survived the worst of that, the work itself benefits by having only itself, by being freed of its own image-making power in the commercial world. In other words, it's difficult to understand what it would be like to be a twenty-three year old painter just emerging into some promise and to be given a retrospective two years later. Or to be so praised by the powers that be

that you are outside yourself a short time after your first work. I don't know how work can survive that.

I. It's an accelerated world, the art world today. The galleries are the historical brokers of twentieth-century art. We can think of better systems, but realistically we can't bring them into being. But as the galleries become this kind of creature in its own right, that is a work of art in its own right, not a very happy work of art, but nonetheless a kind of invention. The pushing and promoting of younger and younger artists with less and less of a history and knowledge of themselves in their work is a self-impelled disaster, and it's becoming more and more evident.

M. What you describe is in graphic parallel much more something like the world of popular music than to a world of artists. Bands or singers are given a year or two, a mad fling, unimaginable material rewards, and then they're tossed aside because they can't produce surface freshness, novelty, anymore.

I. And because there's always someone waiting in line who will take more risks, who will bend their minds and bend their bodies more than those who preceded them to produce what a sated public continually demands.

M. It also seems an interesting mirror of what we were just discussing, the Reagan years, in that this promotion of the myth of the untutored, pure genius, immediately producing marketable work, is a way of forgetting history too, and forgetting labor. It's a way of producing this years hoola hoop and fantasizing about profit. It seems to me that this is the point where painting does pass over into exactly that area of pure decor and immediate gratification. Rather than having the kind of textuality that calls for an effort of response and that maintains its own resistance to glib readings, to continue that metaphor. And yet who could think of a more appropriate thing at the moment.

I. It is appropriate, and in a certain way painters including myself don't feel unhappy or threatened by it. It's a kind of self-cleansing activity. That is, it would happen no matter what,

because everything has been geared to and prepared for it. This political and social climate is the perfect setting for what's taking place. It would happen because the art world has progressively lost its critical sense and become more and more commercialized while trying to remain connected to serious painting. It is increasingly becoming a futures market for young monied classes, those who have made money in such a way that they can only imagine art being made in the same way. Certain people, including myself, find it fascinating and want it to run its course. It is kind of . . . like the wind pruning the tree. It's a natural pruning that's going on. I have survived a lot and I will survive this moment. In fact this is the easiest time I've ever had, because there's no congruence between what's going on and what I'm trying to do. Whereas before there was a tension and a dialogue, the struggle between the contending critiques. It's like watching the wind prune the tree. It'll take the dead wood and just scatter it.

M. Obviously in Chicago you felt a certain degree of community with the young artists who were coming up. Was there a moment after you began to live in New York in '66 when that was also present?

I. There was, but it was not present in an aesthetic union. It was present in a political union. The camaraderie of the sixties was political, not aesthetic. Let's say the middle sixties on. And eventually the late sixties really revolved around the Art Workers' Coalition and "art strike" and the various political actions that were a direct result of the Vietnam War. I think the war placed America in a crisis which (although there was an apparent resolution, the war was ended) was never really resolved. In fact, when you speak of the Reagan years, you're speaking of a period when that too is being reversed, stood on its head. At the time, the object was simply to stop the war, to keep us from harming further a distant and essentially underdeveloped people. That was the object, and to transform American society by that lesson into something else. The transformation never happened. The war was stopped. That was the result of all our activities. But the transformation never happened, and the seventies began without the second part of that intent being in the least realized. I think the Reagan years have totally eliminated the ideology, you might say, that surrounded that

instant. And I think we are in a militarization mode again, heading for trouble, and within a few months or years will be involved in another very debilitating struggle like that.

FOOTNOTES

[1] This conversation took place July 17th, 1986, in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, where Irving Petlin's summer studio is located.

[2] "Irving Petlin Talks with Paul Cummings"; DRAWING Vol. VIII, No. 1, May-June 1986.

[3] Interview by Marcel Cohen, translated by Pierre Joris; ACTS 5, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1986.

MARJORIE WALISH

Two Poems

THE LUTE PLAYER

Have you sent me this?
Have you sent for me?
Twisting the ends
belongs here.

Where is my gift?
Contemporaries report
her excavating in vain ....
Is this my gift?

Raising your hand, on request,
hoisting it high
in obedience, so to speak,
obedience hoisted

like a beacon
but a beacon
to be disbelieved;
and yet as one

who steps forward
and lividly survives
the space
corrugated with sounds

of singers singing,
so too the beacon
steps forward
and lividly survives

rusted steel
set on the road,
in obedience, so to speak,
to the repair

of the road,
the repair
dragged
quite large

and rendered intelligible
on request.
Rusted steel,
we do not see steel today.

CARPET WITHIN THE FIGURE

Less like a sea, than a sea
that has stuck fast, exodus where repose is notorious and servants
rush in
to obey the satrap's last command,
and in carrying out his wishes bring innumerable torchlit belongings
to coma.
And we can hurry our minds. And we are crying. And we are swept
away by
flammable feelings of undetermined origin,
the way a river refers to the many relatives of the disappeared
and consumed.

The way a river refers to the many sites of oblivion, some reclining,
some instrumental in bringing confusion to storm. In a canopied place
"too far from the stars,"
where repose is notorious and half-spoken to himself,
less like a sea, than a sea that has stuck to itself in extreme
passivity
or extreme position, the extremity of the self enacted through the
body —
these peaches, pears, grapes, trailing harnesses
never to be defined beyond the impermanence of a handful,
unerring to him for the last time.
And we can hurry our minds.
And we are swept away by flammable enthusiasms.

Buried as we were under the weight
of political resolve, and strapped to the earth
as if the earth were alive and we ourselves
were inside it, we emit a scent
and a language enmeshed in human affairs.
A leg dimly suggesting a cast of a leg,
or a chair inverted, for him as for others,
are very explicit pressures, reachable, thinkable.

A leg, bent and dimly suggesting the cast of the cast
of the earth, is at any rate, strapped to a language,
buried under the weight of human affairs.
Inside, we emit a shred, and we ourselves
then become thinkable by a ship
slitting the water with its prow,
and writing on our mind as if the earth were alive
and we ourselves were inside it.

Rich still lifes suggesting a cast of a leg,
for him as for others, are thinkable in a love-hate absorption
with things and with things made contingent.
A cast of a leg in retrograde suggests a crisis lengthwise.
Neither coin nor gem,
the disappeared were less decent than a river, a river aroused.

Pushing a massive pyre into the past, we are reachable by
melodrama
as if the earth were alive, but taking an extreme position
within the symbol.
Less like a sea, than a sea
in extreme passivity or extreme position, the extremity of
exodus enacted through the flesh,
where repose is notorious and servants rush in
to obey the satrap's last command like a sea carrying out wishes,
carrying in
the tributaries of the disappeared,
he is so much smaller than the ignorance which had been
everything.

HENRI MICHAUX

Of Language and Writing and the Desire to Turn from Them

(Translated from the French by Richard Sieburth)

One does not come across unfinished languages–half-fashioned, abandoned midway (or sooner).

Yet how many *fore-languages* there must have been, left behind, never to be known. Beginnings of something one was not yet aware of, distractions of a moment . . . passing the time while waiting for the hunt to recommence, games played before worlds were there to count.

. . . games later joined by men bent on order, directorial types, future organizers of the planet: masters of repression, banded together to orient, to lead, managing to instill the conviction that obligations and duties were somehow incumbent, going so far–to insure obeisance–as to attribute to these unknown gods the gift of language which was, as a consequence, to be respected, to be studied, in such a manner that everyone would conform to it, submit to it, language as narrow as their own minds, or as emphatic as their classroom styles–the whole thing now a *requirement*.

The passing moment, the surprise of the spontaneous, the instantaneous, would disappear, eliminated. Continuity, now established in language, would not be relinquished, informing every

domain, every structure, everything that follows from structure, unexpected chains, far-reaching, encircling the Earth, an Earth now in chains.

Applied languages, directed languages, organizational tools.

A business enterprise now, language, unbeknown to anybody, takes the place of murmurs, laments (faint or clear), calls. Commanding, commandeering.

Destined to become an ADMINISTRATION into which every conscience must enter.

Master of the situation, language will answer every need (!). Thus tyrannies.

The handcuffs of words are on for good.

They are everywhere: language forming, limiting, grouping. Establishing a society, a nation, locking it up. Everything placed under arrest, each word with its own way of appropriating the world. Everything is to be woven into a web, the web of words, the tree into a web, the passing breeze, into a web the distant and the near, into a web the bird on the wing, into a web the unsettled soul,

even the blood, the racing blood, into a web of boredom, of enslavement, into a common thing, a vulgar, monotonous thing.

In its innocence, it was a long time before mankind realized where it was being led.

. . . to the ultimate stage of abstraction, having at its disposal the power to eliminate the real and the concrete at a single stroke without so much as leaving a single trace of clutter, it makes full use of the greater convenience afforded by languages whose script is consonantal or alphabetical over those whose characters are pictographic or ideographic.

. . . Their considerable languages would serve to increase and expand without cease the ever-growing *nest-egg called memory* (which early civilizations held in particular veneration). Some gift!

The efficiency of memorization made possible by these tools, the brain functions thereby developed, would transform mankind, everybody a student, everybody forming a society, societies, humanity,

human knowledge, and a few centuries down the line (soon), everybody filing into the offices of Universal Science, everything assembled, disassembled.

Pictographic pre-writing probably a curiosity when it first groped into view, taking its first hesitant steps. How many bits of language were invented, with no particular concern for the future, with no idea of gathering them into a collection, much less a preciously guarded collection. Haphazard evocations, such were their more or less fortunate "gestures," back in the days when signs were ushered in, one by one, with uncertainty, signs that would perhaps not last, that would not be adopted, signs, family games at the outset, played at home by small groups, well away from others.

Lacking rules, linked weakly each to each, signs to pass the time, traces on tree trunks whose bark, unnoticed, would then swell and undo them.

Lacking gravity–or at least lacking the specific gravity owners assume once they have claimed the first strokes of inspiration as their property–these evocations, more or less successful, uninsisting,

these inceptions, sometimes merely for a laugh, for a special laugh in the face of the unexpected, in the face of the ambiguous that remains suspect, a sort of interception of chance, of its surprise, toward which they turned, tantalized, intrigued–all this now gone, forgotten.

For the majority of the earliest "readers," the pastime remained somewhat baroque, not without apprehension, the dread of suddenly finding oneself face to face with an animal or a man making threatening gestures or assuming some ill-defined stance that might indicate the presence of danger–but already there were true *connections* coming into being, recognized as harmless by those who were expecting them, having recovered from their initial state of shock and admiration.

Connections that granted an exceptional kind of emotion, a specifically human emotion, personal, shared, an emotion that in its subsequent forms of analogy, simile, and metaphor would become one of

the joys and specialties of literatures and of poems, for readers (or listeners) and inventors alike.

A habit was being formed.

Lines of "credit;" one got into the habit of using these "bridges" linking markings to things, to beings, to gestures, to situations. There were those whose admiration was such that they soon came to know of no others.

And there were those who profited by this considerable power. A new magic force was making its appearance.

Ambiguous, their sense uncertain, impenetrable, bearers of the power each secret possesses, directed signs, signs put into service, enabling clans, secret societies, religions to take shape, inspiring anxieties, fascinating those too weak to look them in the eye.

On the other hand, of all those who have explored, of all those who have poked around the path of pictographic language, how many have given up in discouragement after a hundred characters or

so, or merely sixty, or perhaps less, afraid that any greater number would simply create clutter?

Sounds and alphabets have come out the winners in almost every case. In these languages–curiously–there is no fear of clutter. Twenty thousand, thirty thousand words are not deemed excessive.

Was nobody aware, was there not even the faintest suspicion that man might be just as pleased to chatter away with no more than a few handfuls of words, as he does in his younger years and sometimes in old age?

Man (like bird), a creature of repetition. A child's babble, a fledgling's: cheeping, *repeating*.

Now that one finds oneself for the first time in the presence of thousands of languages on the planet, all itemized, all repressive, some enormous, disciplined, out in force, taking up space, ever encroaching–one tends to wonder. Embarrassed by these overwhelming

riches, there are those in this world who would prefer *a modest, more private language.*

They would prefer to make do–so they believe–with a language whose means are limited, a language not to be enlarged or extended, a language fulfilling a few basic needs, among friends (and refusing hangers-on); not territorial, not aiming to respond to everything, to cover the entire ground of the Earth, even less to conquer, to convince, to subjugate, to occupy a country or span a lifetime spent in its service, but a language with flavor, with privacy.

Small bits of language, well chosen, would do, would please, after a while, would change.

A language without pretense, for those whose knowledge is without pretense.

Hardly a language at all, yet fully alive, emotions rather, in signs whose sole decipherment would lie in distress, in ill-humor. Signs, the lack of which now leadeth our lives into frustration.

After millennia, the desire for the sign, for the pictograph, still intact.

With its own means, its own ease, its own deliverance.

Beyond the world of utilitarian signals (another chain in the making), a future still lies ahead, a vastness, a renewal, a vacation, satisfaction in, and of, itself.

Sign: at last delivering us from litanies of words, from phrases depending on other phrases extending into further phrases, it would set the brain free from local overoccupation.

Back to a primitive operation whose temptation, still unspoken, now receives a fresh impulse.

Signs enabling us to be open to the world in a different fashion, creating and developing a *different function* within man, *disalienating* man.

Steve Benson, Chris Cheek, Allen Fisher

Assumptions Table

Texts derived from transcripts based on sound recordings of performance on 13 July 1984 at Chisenhale Dance Space in London

Do you think that there's an intuitive system to decide that a tape-recorder is recording?

I was wondering why people bought insurance, if they feel like it's a way of belonging to something

It's to do with broking and breaking. If you break things you need insurance to cover your breakage, replacement,

Yes, I would replace almost everything I own if I had the chance or could afford it.

I don't like to miss things, but I get a big kick out of losing things.

Is that because you kick them?

Habits?

Yes, I've got many habits. I don't always recognize them.

I find that when I'm walking down a corridor, I usually tend to walk in the middle at some point which could be called equidistant between the two walls, but sometimes I surprise myself by hugging one of the edges, and I can't explain that, but then I don't think I want to find an explanation anyway.

I find that thinking too much often puts me quite in the dark, a very quiet and secluded space, but still surrounded.

Like a moat?

A goat?

Back, sort of running backwards.

I was thinking of old age but I

That's a funny expression, 'Thinking of old age'

'But I'.

It could be just a habit, or it's just an association or it's the kind of thing that you say without too much forethought.

When he thinks of old age he goes into a rigorous self-improvement pattern; getting up earlier and starting to eat better, looking at himself more closely in the mirror, that kind of thing. It just takes his mind off the problem.

You mean Steve does?

It may have been largely because he didn't really have too much else to do, because, in that, it was like he was living in a certain corner of town and it was quite clear that in one point of the compass but in the other three,

So there's still only four?

Well, I don't know, migration is a difficult business.

But does it just have to come down to numbers, or a choice of directions?

I'm completely dissatisfied with numbers and it makes it a peculiar, to me, not a, but problematical, to have a choice.

Well, the kind of problem you enjoy?

In other words am I rejecting any proportion in particular? I'm afraid to leave anyone out.

I doubt that anyone's quite left 'out', exactly.

I mean we're talking about symmetry for this problem, is it just a matter of what it seems to be from the outside, two ears, two legs, or is it a little bit more intimate?

Well you know there's that expression an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and it always makes me think of cannibalism.

That's a symmetrical expression.

Like one person eating another person.

Is this a proven phenomena? Does it matter whether it is or not?

It's obviously (a) scapegoat, some kind of walkie-talkie between thermometers, yeah!

Like taking a pulse?

Yeah.

That's difficult. I find it very difficult to take somebody else's pulse.

I find it very difficult to be so constantly in the role of insisting on things.

Yes I can imagine that.

Well I don't!

I can't imagine that, but if I could,

He does it a lot though. Did you ever cross the street and forget that you did that?

Yeah. There's a town in California called Mill Valley.

This is upstate? I mean it's

Relatively speaking, yeah.

I bought a newspaper in California on mining, which talked about the concentration tables. The tables that they use to find the various minerals that they're looking for.

Yeah, there are those kinds of people who are constantly looking for minimals.

Do you see this line as a street?

If I could line them up, I feel like I could see them.

I don't understand that.

They're, in other words, a kind of frame that I would really be constructing with the things themselves.

A kind of stretcher?

I came down into the valley and got out of the car having thumbed a lift from this guy who was going partly the direction I was going in, and on one side of the road when I got out of the car there was a large bear in a cage on the back of a lorry. Is that what you mean?

Yeah, because you can locate every perception in an image that way.

So if I see a bottle on a shelf, there's no doubt about sideways?

Well there is a sense of inventing an image.

Which is a little different from imprisoning, that I've been talking about?

I think so. There's also a blur between inventing an image and directly perceiving an image, which might be–what would you call that?

Impersonating a mirage.

Something that's far away, gets close before you know it.

Say humps for 500 yards, is my nearest approximation of that, but that's an in-joke. What is an in-joke?

Inward turning, probably. It doesn't go outward, it doesn't seem to be open.

Where's the humor in that?

It's internal, it's enclosed.

It's like the humor that's in the self-consciousness in seeing myself as a ridiculous fabrication.

So the stomach smiles, so to speak.

It is as though the stomach could speak and with that throws up its real properties.

Shall we just broaden what speech means?

OK, let's broaden what speech means.

If you were closer I could touch you.

Well let's broaden what touch means.

How wide?

Well, I'm not sure that I would think of it in terms of wide or far or broad or deep, but more in a kind of triangle somewhere in the middle of a pink forest where, that's what I'm talking about.

I don't think I've ever seen a pink forest. I could imagine a pink forest. Would it be all may trees? Oh no, it would have to be cherry blossom. Maybe it was just the sky reflected in the may trees. It was a pink sky, but the may trees were white and every time I looked at the may trees they were pink. I didn't really believe they were may trees.

So, we're in a blue funk or what could be a grey fog in the middle of the matrix.

It's a locus, it's a way of perceiving our own things that we have as though they were around us.

There are certainly things around us.

It's suddenly a locust that confronts us, by

Is this an animal?

Locust.

It is.

Consuming everything before it and around it.

Like what you find around you cons you towards this idea of being there.

I'm usually convinced of that, but it's true, I'm not always convinced. But isn't that kind of

I'm easily convinced of anything.

Convinced?

That's shocking!

I can't help it, I find myself constantly arriving at decisions which have already been made for me, and I don't know, it's a pocket book mentality which has adopted me. I'm sorry.

I regret that I wish I were thinking about something other than what I'm thinking about.

One consideration was to build a very large block of flats and all the lights would be different colors, I mean all the windows. I just felt shocked.

I imanded them stranded there. I demanded them, I imagined them in their different colors.

Did you confuse demand and imagine?

Yes.

Yeah I did too and I looked it up in the instruction booklet and page six and the section towards the bottom of the page told me that what I should do is put my fingers in the sockets and I did. I'm lucky to be here.

Thank you.

You're saying that because he's valorizing being here.

Well it makes me feel good.

You've no idea how good it makes me feel!

I often say thank you when I feel good.

I don't know what to say.

I feel pretty good when I say thank you, but I don't say it very often, that's true.

I often feel pretty uncomfortable when I say thank you.

That's often why I say it. I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

I often apologize when I feel most uncomfortable actually. Like, if I feel that I have something to offer and I begin to offer it and then feel that maybe what I'm offering nobody wants, I start to feel uncomfortable and apologize.

I have to stop and think back you know and ask myself if what I'm doing is something that has a quality of completeness about it or not and that's a funny question to ask in the middle of something or should I wait until I think that it's finished and then ask myself if that was something that I wanted to have be complete or not.

But if my back is uncomfortable do I say that my back is unfinished or that the chair is unfinished or that my life on the chair is beginning to finish?

Do you?

I'm not sure. I was thinking of certainties or

For me it would depend if I were asking myself

A question, or was it another way of informing yourself?

Well if it's a way of gauging distance from any kind of parameter within which we might cycle because, if you get a puncture there are easy ways of going about solving that kind of problem, but if your wheel has gone out of true in terms of developing a warp or a bump, the thing's more long-term somehow.

It could be just as fun with a dinky toy with a broken wheel.

It's all over with dinky toys and me. I just look at them, that's it.

I run my fingers up the wall, now. What do you do, Steve?

I, um

I've seen him kick his leg like a horse.

Yeah I've seen him do that, too, but actually that's not fair because at the time he was impersonating a fictitious queen who was fifteen foot high, we were told, and old stories have a horrible habit of coming back at the most inappropriate moment.

Would you find it rude if I said your memory is incorrect?

No.

I went to the house where I grew up and saw the yard where I used to play with my brother with little cars and trucks and also cowboys and Indians and also cops and robbers.

I used to have a fort which was about two foot square, and I also had a large teddy bear which was about eighteen inches high I suppose, and I would sit the teddy bear in the fort, and I could never quite get it in without breaking part of the wall down. I feel that if they're going to make toys they should make them all on the same scale because it's very confusing for us youngsters otherwise.

I saw a very bad movie last week.

The scale of things matters a lot when my own sense of proportion in relationship to the world and what happens in the world is so unsteady.

Uh-huh.

In the movies it's always being negotiated, that sense of distance, and what's large and what's small and what kind of focus I find the world demands of me to bring to it.

But I mean what the movie was about was just being strong.

Well one's got to keep that sense of proportion around, hasn't one?

Some people, but everyone, I don't know.

I'm sorry, what were you saying?

I'm sorry what was I saying?

I missed what you were saying.

While I was too busy saying it, I missed what he was saying.

Oh, I was talking about strength which was what the movie was about, about how it's better for everybody in the society to be strong and kill each other.

And I was talking about keeping a sense of proportion.

I was thinking about weakness and that sense of force that can come with feeling the necessity of acting from a position conceived and enforced as weakness.

Does it make you feel as if you're crying inside sometimes?

Well I was talking about weakness and that sense of acting against force which sometimes makes me want to cry.

I was talking because in that sense that I have of weakness that is acting in terms of forcing the cry of resistance or anger, I sometimes do break down. Is that cowardice, is that a self-realization?

Sometimes you can just look at a lawn of grass and cry.

The ways that big trees seem to sometimes just rush out of that mat.

I just walked straight into the room and there was a guy on the television and he was just rushing at these three wooden posts with a ball. I mean I just turned, I didn't turn it off but I felt as though I wanted to.

Television just terrifies me.

It doesn't always terrify me, is that perhaps a weakness?

I find it very difficult to talk about it in any sense other than ending up beginning to make the kind of statement which always brings me to feel that somehow what I'm starting to say about something of which I have very little other than, how shall I say, close experience, brings me to understanding that the distance I have from what I say is much greater than the feeling I have of the distance between myself and my own feelings.

When I have something to say it's as though I've come a long way towards my mouth in order to put it into sounds and when it comes out and realizes that they're, if there are, other people out there, I'm

drawn back and amazed, I can't really take, I would like to, but I can't take responsibility.

You can't help respond, can you?

I can't get to the hospital?

You can if you take the right bus, I think you'll find it's the second street down and a number 3 will get there. But I'm not sure about that, I think it's the number 3.

I can if I respond.

How can you not respond?

I think I hold much too hard onto things so that I stop myself from allowing myself to become lost getting here.

I prefer to think that, to conceive that I am lost, that to get here would be to get lost. This is something more than I've thought in the past.

Well I would like to feel lost but I normally just feel confused.

I fall asleep a lot. Sometimes I just fall asleep, and

How would you describe that falling?

It's a lack of attention, it's

Not a state of doubt.

I would say that I spend 95% of my time asleep if that's the basis.

That's very difficult.

It's different because you do catch yourself up without a real, you know without having a sense that you're being wounded, or thrown off a boat.

That would be terrible, I'd hate to get thrown off a boat, I can't even swim!

Recurrent themes I think are a sap to attention.

Could you say that again?

I agree. I feel that when you know that things are, understandable in the sense of spotting the pattern, it's in the recognition that the danger lies, and when you recognize that danger you are attent and when you don't recognize the danger you put your foot in the bucket.

I think it can be useful to recognize a pattern, in order to change it. Otherwise how do you know you've made a change?

I agree.

I don't see how a pattern can be changed.

You mean you just keep knitting until you get to the bottom line?

I don't know that I knit. I think that I commit to a pattern, consciously or not consciously, and then, when I recognize it, I stop or else I, I think that's what I do, I think that I do see how I change a pattern, by becoming conscious of it, and then something else happens, if I don't decide not to do it.

I've forgotten how you do it.

It's not by starting over again but it's very similar. It involves deciding not to stop.

That's a good decision. Is it always a good decision? Hell no!

I feel that people get stuck worrying about whether they're changing or whether they're stuck or whether they're recognizing or whether they're not recognizing and or because they talk about it so much that they begin to dwell on that fact of whether or not they are stuck and even if they were stuck they couldn't recognize it because they're stuck talking about 'stuckness'.

My mother used to make me much of a muchness over myself.

It's an expression that she used a lot?

My mother made me one of those too. My mother used to make me beans on toast until I was sick of it, and punish me by preventing me from having beans on toast 'til I was hungry. My mother made me sick.

Splitting myself into two halves, maybe I'll think of myself as appetite and myself as fulfillment for example.

OK, OK, right.

My, it goes on like that. The operative term appears to be possession, no, belonging I guess, yeah.

And that is which, I mean a need to belong plus the appetite as a need to belong?

Oh no, the need to assign belonging to my, in other words I have these various kinds of relationships to the world and I am, instead of, what makes me sick that instead of making a function–instead of like bloody doing it, I am sectoring out states of belonging that are inclusive and exclusive. Such as appetite on the one hand and in the opposing team satisfaction.

So you open the book and the book says, "This book is to tell you how to use an alphabet" and you can't read, and the first thing it says is "This book belongs to," and then you fill your name in, but you can't read until you've read the book, and you can't read the book because you can't read.

But do you still fill your name in?

Not until you can write as well. D'you know I hadn't thought of that.

I would say that probably a lot of people fill their name in and never bother to read it, either their name or the book.

So, where do they get the experience to read the book?

Well they don't. Someone else reads the book and tells somebody else what the book says and those people tell other people what the book says.

And they all believe them?

It's, you look sideways at it, and get an impression that's filled in by that which your conscience and all those, for want of a better word information that, because it informs your conscience, really fills in the gaps.

But the dog comes by and it bites my leg it doesn't mean every dog that comes by bites my leg, does it?

If my leg falls off it doesn't mean that every leg I have falls off.

No it doesn't, that's true.

I use a dead leg and I clean out the bits of food between my teeth with it.

You call those dead legs? Is that a local expression?

Yeah, extremely local.

Like your top pocket?

Yeah, I like my top pocket.

I like my self-portrait. I took it to the ocean with me. Went on a long voyage on a ship. Spent most of the time on the deck.

Must have been nice.

Was anybody else there with you?

I don't remember anyone else being there with me.

Who was

But there was a funeral. I do remember that because I remember the flowers and one of them was in a big wreath that said, 'Get well soon' had been crossed out and it said 'Rest in peace' instead, and there was a lot of black crepe around. It was pretty nice, it was kind of blowing and whistling a little bit in the wind.

So did the black crepe belong with the 'Get well soon,' or did it just come with the crossing out, or were you the person who was doing the crossing, and if so, where were you crossing from to, and if you were on your own, who was driving, if you were on the deck?

It was all in a very rigid sequence and I had to follow the steps one by one exactly as they were laid out or I knew that I would break my mother's back.

You were riding on your mother's back?

Somebody told me but I couldn't remember. I knew it was dangerous but I just felt like I had to go ahead.

I was just looking out the window and a blackbird just hit the glass.

That's surprising! And the other thing that surprises me is how much men under pressure tend to start referring to their mothers.

My mother's not a blackbird.

My mother hit the window though.

Hm.

I don't believe me, either.

Because if I imagine hitting my mother I imagine that she would have difficulty in resisting. It's ridiculous and with great difficulty.

What is it exactly that we're resisting?

DIANE GLANCY

Three Poems

PERU, KANSAS

The creek slutes north of town,
a curve, a grocery, a few houses, fence slats,
then the country blozomed to the land.

Warrior & squawl
with towel hanging at the car window \ edges flapping
like a bird trying to take off from the land.

Out here where water's scarce
cows stand in ponds to hold them down.
Language starts with their breath
& the hurrrr of wind
around grain elevators \ space ships
in their towers.

Far away, turnpike tollgates are moons of Uranus.
The dark sky \ transparent at night \
but for the black-eyed rudge of trees.

In Peru \ salibales of words are hayrolled
in fields.
Look & you will find corridors of meaning
in any direction, layers of it,
anything you want \
a square box, root of fields, soy beanies & weet.

You can even feel the laps of the sky's tongue
on your shoes.
All directions, yet the openness doesn't take
the hoe handle.

You still hold your loss as though it were something.
The cutting into molars \ jaw \
the cold white bone of the skull.

Driving through Kansas
is like being married to a man you didn't fit with \
not having money \ your days full of chores
& boredom \
a towel in your window to keep out the sun.

Robes of wheat whick by
like crosses in a country cemetery.

You pass the unanimous bend of weeds.
Just look where they are pointing \ the openness
in fields. The opundance of language seeping
to another.

Ee tabo cay moose \ Worriar & squaw \
their carwindow flapping over shed & galvanized tanks.

Step anywhere & grasshoppers jump in the corn.

The wind flings you with dust from fields & gravel roads.

Clouds in hopeless plight to wind patterns
qpurting revolt from county line to line.
Soon, the little sprats of rain on sunflars & gutturals
of old stone houses \
sheds following like calves.

The space that sounds in brittle corn stalks
is all yours \ the hinge of bugs opening Peru \
when you beat hollyhocks with your stick
until the yard pinked with furzz
& the grandmother yelled her tomahawk language.

All language defeats \ pulls out your tongue \ strips
the loose string of bone from your back \
the bonds of ponds not giving in to earth,
but kissing the sky.

All your life you want to feel ponded to the land \
enaporating upword.
The sky thumbs through the corn rows
as you pazz by
head whacked off \ feet lifted from the floor
in a car going fast to get through.

JULY 14

Just turning out one fork was all she could do at the end. She rested all day for that one chore & when I visited from Oklahoma she rallied for a moment & sank into the rest of the evening. The mind puts its body in another room. Shuffs it off as a child. Orphaned. Goes on to meet whatever's there. The house with it's difficult furniture & border at the ceiling. We practiced farewell in the overtuffed room. Ordinary chat in the drive, the dear legs of the china cabinet, gaudy glasses that plague the memory. Radio, garish bric-a-brac. The trunk of her complaining whittled the blade of flowers on the wall. The white schmoo of the washer in the basement. Tools for biscuits. The fridge with its brain coiled above its shoulders. Beds in the other room bought with the care of surgery. Out of one meal after another letting the routine separate the stove that heats the sun passing over it. Erupting pintos & mashed potatoes going & coming back the jump of sun & shade on the rug. The meat hammer stuck blood & flour to the paper. The words like landscapes I heard at the dining room table.

Mother GOodbye_____

May pots. Baskets
of petunias.
You were the watermelon slice
on summer evenings_____
Your transparent teeth left a hole
in our lives.

Pudding and gristle.

_____SEa the shape of a
watermelon wedge,
sAwtooth waves over half the slice.

_____Another slice of clear sea,
purple ship,
a spike from the base toward it
like the old paper-holder on your desk.

_____Now the seA
a jar of black-cherry juice
you bought.
The column of disease
rips your hand from ours.

_____Black sEA
white ghost sHiP.
The grave, mother
a piece of the mind chipped off the wedge.

_____CanNoT hold on to you.
The Titanic dunked_____
biNOcULars watch you sink
from a small peak on the roof
of the watermelon.

BOB PERELMAN

Face Value

History (present tense, all lies) is a peculiar form of bondage. Children or ourselves, the liver's unsavory narrative, vignettes of teeth. Hostages to fortune join the winning team. The minute after you break your toe, there will continue to be that rent in the canvas of personal time, of which any one second in any one place must stand, circumstantially, as the sole, erroneous symbol of the detachments of consciousness.

Now it is night. It is no accident
that the sun has ceded the sky
to the forces of darkness,
and thus too the rhapsody
must table his trowel, drown his gavel, muffle his soiree.
The debate, so debonair and contingent,
in which the swains of production
wooed the shepardesses of the periodic table,
is kaput. Echoes of those voices and dallying
resistances still resound,
infinitesimally, downtown in the protagonists'
mausoleum. It is here that we,
their bereaved offspring, tend their memories
and are tended in the playhouse
of the state, our true inheritance,
but underfunded, and run by counselors
who don't really like children.
And it is precisely here, in this darkness,
that the incidents occur:
scratchings, foodfights, screams, scary boastings.
But there's always a story in the corner,
uniting the hero, his virtue, and his happiness
as easily as the sixty foot putt
on tape, animate and inevitable above
the lushness of the beautifully kept
bermuda grass, negotiates the undulations,
then disappears
into the hole. Now it is night.

Quote: How admirable he is who does not say
How ephemeral life is
When he sees a flash of lightning
Unquote:

The dancer can jump only so high, in flesh or photograph, and audiences have a limited amount of money, for which there are other than curtain calls. Impossibilities, cold sores, rhetoric add up faultily, not an actual history in comparison to the advances in military technocracy, aiming devices, explosives, powers of penetration, headline penumbras, number of bullets per area per second, saturating defiance.

The moon gets yellow
nearing the oil storage tanks.
Second half does not relate,
any more than the aspirin
to the institution,
or repetition of sensation,
eating out of the wooden bowl
again and again,
recaptures the ligaments
of the precapitalist community
growing poppies for the people on TV.

I could be watching the 49ers, or setting my worm farms in order, or patching out my claims on a personal but real corner of the market. The ever vanishing simile

I, if he did exist, would know
how to spell, matter-of-factly
just by looking at the daffodils,
or whatever word, I can tell
what they are and what I was.
But look, I ordered soup
and was given
soap.

A hundred million enfranchised deletions looked toward the burning sky–lots to delete here–and weeping swore that neither they nor their families would ever be hungry again, not even if they had to lie cheat and endlessly defraud the tips of their senses.

Looking back I seem to have left those skies
and to be standing under this one
just as it's spreading wings to say goodnight.
Books, looks, legs, dimes, ears, clouds ago,
it said thanks, goodbye, threshed sound and meant
something thrown away by mistake to mean the other one,
the dead enemy's blood pulsing through my veins

Pure, then impure, then leave me alone in the corner while I pull my pants down to determine strictly myself if I'm aroused enough to name my sex and as begotten sin something to throw at the face value of fantasy a fallen log blocking the otherwise interesting trail my appetite makes for the nearest downed stag doe leaf or randomly moving commodity. In plain speech, a person. Buy, and eat. Life, that bourgeois unity. Boredom has its rhythm too, as have interest rates and styles of grief.

I'm necessarily not good enough for rationality
no salt, live forever, jogging, wheatgrass enemas,
whoopee cushions in place of sign-along Messiahs
self loathing just to keep in sight of the pageant

utterly protected, not to say caged in, by its fellow beings, and this allows it to vote for whatever it wants, whoever it says

The voice in the car
feels like a million bucks, but
watch it, as the film runs out

too busy standing in line to have the emotional wherewithal to stride into that darkened original booth and pull the lever in a powerful and creative way

Losing track is fun the first time, but after the tenth day, one longs for a little order, not to say rigor, or bloodshed, in the endless massage. Blood running down the walls, hair upswept into a solid mat of otherworldly matter, those Aztec priests had otherness so externalized death was no more individual than any given inhalation. What was the big deal? What was for lunch? How were the children? The grandchildren? Jason was crawling backwards, a look of mild wonder on his face as his goal grew smaller though clearer in his visual field, not that he would have registered it in just those terms.

Repetition can only produce so much. I'd rather be sitting in front of my computer, feet in a warm ocean, tan, my stomach hard and my features articulate, in fact my whole body a phallus, significant, inextricably the direction of historic particulars, an undentable sign, deathless, debtless, making passionate love to whatever needs to be said. The sun, overhead, blazes once, endlessly.

available immediately
marked down from obvious,
unpriced junk flooding the right to
work, to disorganize, to shoot to
confuse the issue long enough to
get to watch the end of the game

INTERMEZZO
The light is bent lines.
Repetition does, in some sense
breed understanding, and understatement
comes in time.
Soon comes the night.
The intimacy I demand
throws away light bent over me.
Intimacy does in some sense
breed understanding. Bending over,
doing the same thing, understated
intimacy demanding sense,
endless and in some unlikely place
stopped forever.

COUPLET
By itself it unconsciously spells
what I consciously want to say

STILL LIFE
There's a blue cup there,
on the top of the water,
and there's an orange carrot, orange airport,
the airport chairs are orange, there,

the far away word
in the marriage of meaning & meaning,
muscular utterance, and there's
the wooden spoon

There's an orange in the icebox, so orange
and the sky is blue today, so far
there is flat distance
available as distant color

A row of chairs, one chair,
a defect standing for itself
here in the abject uncolored
blue lake of the spoken body.

COUPLET
You talk too much
you never shut up

I can say what it, an elegy, is for
opening into a bound, and thus manmade space.
But the flavor of the words,
born of the space between people
not to mention what happens, stop,
sunset, by the original artist, framed.

drainpipes

blue.

I look up and see a bit of mottled blue behind a skin of fog after days of grey. Weather is the last refuge of the whirlpool of I. I own my own body, balanced upon opinions given me in garbled barely alterable form at my birth at which I was one of very many, the horizon unseen by virtue of numerous qualities that, visualized, were later to be objects, things I wanted, to be gotten from nation states wearing the family mask.

Then so much came to mean itself, secure and simple, separable. I'm not complaining. Write anything and then just let the printer or the critic or the president, buoyed up by the contention of realms of hierarchies below, handle it. As the recruit is shipped, in adolescence, to the jungle in which he is most needed, and at that moment the public space is born, invaded, narcotized, viz.: stoned, wearing earphones, could be Haydn, could be Dylan, could be B.B. King, blasting away at whatever moves, that monotonous green, money literally growing on trees, somebody else back home, bigger taller more natural with much better taste spending it all, "That's the way . . . God planned it"–one wants to rip the tape, twist it, scorch. So the

word pops into place, anthropomorphic, angry, screwed, literally, letter by letter, wrong and stuck.

Bludgeoned sightings of nothing in particular.
And out here there is nothing other
to exchange any of it for,
except perhaps things eternal
and lest our country graveyard have died in vain,
one hopes, as one reads and reasons,
to amass one's fortune.

The green leaves glimmer eeriely,
as if one had travelled too long
by the light of reason and was finally,
hand crashing into forehead in cartoon misbelief,
here, as if *this* could be
the actual configuration of things

staring at the private language
of the angry father the light
after the end of the tunnel
that was luring so many voters into it
despite the nagging premonition
of having buried their great-grandchildren

life's over, attics, garbage, storage, naval stations, aunts, disney, tomb art, national geographic, native bodies, but they're all so flat and glossy, turn the page they're gone

a subaudible wave of hatred mounts up for those dull green curtains steaming, like language, cabbage, money–lies! truth! muscles twitching to set the record straight–monotonously changing hands under the thumb of enumeration.

Already most villages fashions were under surveillance. For having failed to prevent this, they were declared insane, backward, and were pitied enormously by the fourth-hand goods dumped on them as they practiced their pliable pitiable rites of marriage, analysis, medicine, and selling their decorations at absurd prices

turquoise,
carnelian,
jade,
flint,

flesh,
face,
2$ bill,
3$ bill,
50¢ piece.

BENJAMIN HOLLANDER

Commentary of the False Numbers – 3, 4

here
and where
you who are

a region
of his speech
was, a reason
(*after Paul Celan*)

from "Conversation in the Mountains": An Interview with Paul Celan

"Yes, to respond to your question concerning the necessity of encounter between the book and its subject, I will tell you that one evening a description of both, half image, half veil, entered me. At the time, in effect, memory worked forward also, in effect as echo. What we called correspondence or symmetry was actually a process of continual anticipation."

"At the same time there was the effortless forgetting as later we stepped into a region that had been blown away. This was during the war. What we called continual anticipation was actually the concerted effortless drumming to shattered granite which we'd heard of as "the clearing." In effect as echo. This was during the war. Yes, if you point me there, I can turn you to the stash of roses, the chalk dust on the eyelash, the chalk marks on the road from quarry to camp. Everyone was dragging. Slates. What we called continual anticipation was actually a program to commit the time to a moment's blindness pushed to a future clearing of things. It sounded so like a moment's violence. In effect as echo. This was who you are. Hurt. Half image, half veil. Yes, if you point me there, they heard you. Everyone was writing. Slates. Everyone was pushed with their stashes in the dirt. It sounded so like the time of writing committed to a moment's blindness and pushed to a future clearing of things. In effect as echo. This was disturbing the war. Infectious,

deserving, I did not respond. A rich sickness entered him and I did not respond. I guessed it. Yes, poetry, he said, is a gift, what must be said, what sticks in our throats. In effect as echo. What we called continual anticipation was actually the sticks to our throats repeatedly given. Answer yes or no. At the same time. In effect as echo. There was the clearing. This was during the war and I don't need to relate what the life of a Jew was like disturbing the war. It sounded so like a moment's violation pushed over in the midst of these movable fronts. It sounded so like I heard my chest move then, a beat. Yes, if you lift me there, I can turn you to the street of crushed lenses, what ground we stepped off–pushy. Walk. In front of me. Yes, if you turn me over, I can hear you work up to the wall of roses, the washed cocks, feet first and cursed, then bled, a bit. At the same time stashed into drums. In effect as echo. Poetry, he said, is a gift. They necklaced the children. They slit the chest then lit a fire within. What we called continual application was actually not even pressure but more faith in his face than in anyone else. It sounded so like he kept his promises, the only one to have kept his promises, so. Yes, he said–from the one who kept all his promises–to us poetry is a given, what must be sent, senseless, half-phased. Half image, half veil. Everyone was dragging. Slates. They heard you at a point. Hurt. In effect as echo. At the point of a nail. Answer yes or no. At the same time. There was the hearing. This was after the war and I don't need to relate what the life of a Jew was like enduring after the war. Half image, half veil. This was disturbing who you are. At a moment's blindness. Everyone was writing. Slates. At the same time washed in sums, naked and nightlong, pushed off a wall of roses. In effect into roads, as echo. What we called continual anticipation was actually the nails through our cocks repeatedly driven. Pushy. Yes, then bled, a bit. This was during the war. Yes, he said, poetry is a gift and so at the same time in effect as echo what we called the slippage in continual articulation was actually the applied law of natural increase or the gift of natural increase doubling as slave flow and so let slipping away. It sounded so like a moment's thing led and pushed into a clearing. This was during the singing. Everyone was writing. Slates. At the same time. Driven. In effect without air, as transport. Yes, if you lift me there, this was during the singing. In effect without lungs. It sounded so like a moment's blindfold. Answer yes or no. Yes, move in front of me or let me go. In effect as echo. So there you are. Yes, there was a stroke across the length of my writing arm."

"To respond to your letter I will tell you: no sooner does an image enter than it gets caught in the web, and a thread starts spinning,

spinning itself around the image, a veil-thread; spins itself around the image and begets a child with it, half image, half veil. A movable letter. Yes, move my writing hand. So there you are."

"Yes, I will tell you I am exacting of two minds. (It's disabling.) There will be no reason to discuss it *one evening*. Answer yes or no."

"Yes, to respond to your question he, Celan, said I swear I will leave. In effect I have. At the same time. A thing to refuse you. Yes, he said, poetry is a gift. (A thing to refuse you.) In effect as echo. It sounded so like a moment's slave flow pushed to a future clearing of things. At the same time. In effect as echo. I have a thing to push you. A thing to refuse you. Repeatedly given. At a moment's violence. Yes, clarity in the sense of silence."

AMMIEL ALCALAY

After Ecclesiastes

In Memoriam: Dan Pagis

A wheel, no helm, said Koheleth:
a wheel, no helm. A call, a wail:

Taut in a mesh, can man draw attar
in his kennel, his culvert of burden?

A generation goes
another comes
and the earth
over any end
an augment:

As a spark
the sun rises

as it goes
ill mechanic

sheaf of chaff
to ignite again:

Down, roll of a drum,
boreal, it twists on,
sows and veers,
alee, an aura,

a veil twisted
on a shaft,
an aura:

All sources go to the sea
and the sea no anomaly
ill mechanic to whom all go back:
no sham the hum of them.

Call odd vermin, agony.
Luck. All wish ill, lie, utter.
Lot's bane, all a rot: of
all time, malaise, unmesh me:

Of mass how hew awe, show, eye
If my motion wishes cessation.
Vain. Cold ash. Taut in a mesh

I wish a new affair.
Ash, a roomer:
"Wraith! What's fresh?
Hewn anew then ruined
a myriad realms
and lives before us."

No memory of first ones
nor of last ones who will be
of those neither will there
be memory still after:

I Koheleth
was King
over Israel
in Jerusalem:

I meted out my heart in discourse
explored with wit all issues enacted
taut below the swim of seraphim:

woe and rue gave ill He Him
to men to answer to:

I realized all motion
ceases in ash

taut in a mesh
a vain call in a hovel

a wroth aura:

Bent? Only luck can ill rectify
and lack in all is innumerable:

I'd uttered, aye, in heart, lame, in vain
I augmented and affixed my wit above all
ushered ill life before me in Jerusalem:

my heart, wry and keen, knew wit:

And I gave it know true wit
lunatic even imbecilic wit:

I fathomed
the sham of
even them.

Hewn?
A ruin,
a wraith:

Overwise
are rife
in choler

a dose
of wit
is a dose
of ache.

ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA

Six Paintings and Drawings

WASHBASIN AND MIRROR
Oil on Wood / 98 x 83.5 cm / 1967

REMAINDERS FROM A MEAL

Pencil on Paper / 42 x 54 cm / 1971

MARIA

Pencil Drawing / 70.1 x 53.3 cm / 1972

WINDOW AT NIGHT

Oil on Wood / 120 x 81 cm / 1971-80

THE HOUSE OF ANTONIO LOPEZ TORRES

Pencil on Paper / 82 x 68 cm / 1972-80

GRAN VIA

Oil on Wood / 90.6 x 93.5 cm / 1974-81

Nicholas & Lisa Corrin

On Antonio López García

Antonio López García is a great admirer of Francis Bacon. "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." Bacon's absorption in T. S. Eliot is well known. His art strips the veil of habit from our eyes. To Bacon, life is a "series of destructions." Man, the écorché, squats upon the background of strange-hued nothingness. Bacon belongs to what Huxley once coined "the negative visionaries." As does Antonio López García. Here too, life dwells in the house of death.

But the reality that López García forces us to bear is essentially unpeopled. Not a visceral torment, not directly, but a meticulously painted space where human processes *have* occurred: the passage and the drainage, the chewing and the cleansing. What remains is absence, a void approaching terror but also quietude, the lives, the hours irrevocably gone.

On a stained table, something almost human sleeps or recoils. It is fragile and tight like a young blossom. Its blood mingles with splotches and paint chips.

In passage down an urban corridor, arrows rush past buildings, past us. The future is at our backs. A clock reads 6:30. The moment fixed seems laughable.

López García has spent up to twenty years to complete a painting, returning to the same place again and again until the last minutiae have been recorded. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he spares no effort to insure the durability of his art; he recommends that his students study Max Doerner's guide to the materials and techniques of the Old Masters. Yet this enormously patient and painstaking artist is a saboteur of his own efforts. Encouraging the paint to boil and blister, he invites decay into the materials of his trade.

Present in a number of paintings is a horizontal line, not evident at first glance. Neither abstraction nor an element congruous with the "realism" of the picture, this subtle intrusion of illogic negates the spectator's false identification of realism with habit, his counterfeit reality. This line is flat as a lake is flat, as a corpse lies flat, but it extends beyond the bounds of the picture and implies infinity; in the very center of our space lies this horizon of depthless gray, the reality we cannot bear.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Blow-Me-Down Etude

Ah! through the hush the looked-for
midnight clangs!
— William Morris, *The Earthly Paradise*

"Put her in her Chair! Put her in her
Chair!" The bleary weights of nothing-to-explain,
nobody to explain to. News of the weave, nub
of the bleep. I take what I'm given and give
what I've taken, stake what I'm bidden, dumped
when I've driven. (Upset to get.) Just when
thought, for one thing, affecting has got
to as possible point, whatever, a few
as many were and worse didn't –
but not to dwell, to fall, specifically
where was that it might, matter (formal)
given coagulation. Remember you brought,
prying to amount for, rather given your own
dizzying play in that inflection. To open up
as much of, as far as, to convey
in this respect and a sense, at the
same, more relevant in terms of revealing, finally,
forged dominions have mistook. The only
true epiphanies the ones misplaced (the
forced replacements of). Arrived with silent
fire, projector of what was faced. *We thought we might*

be better than. But the knees swell, the
feet collapses. No further shown, as if it's
only do too little, or much too much. As
if more strobe at clay could quell command: fear
frozen with fright, tautologies our
topologies; tear the midsection & loose the
rig. There was a moment that hope made
realer than the pause endured, who wept
like trawlers without recall. No villanelle to chew
nor salmon to. These tendencies arise
out of a culture and cannot be confined to those
defined them: a pound of defiance is
worth an ounce of lure. (She was a giant
of the experience of being a baby & proud
was I. . .) Summary
or tainted with coats of (jangle what
you will, where you pry–not fables with
testy, tedious tirades, waves at)
plaint. Oracular insects
infusing pseudonymous stuffed desks (stuck
decks). Rivers of lies, severs of
glides, desperate for an even chance at less
than might release, at least a vantage
to profane the holier version of these
visions, riddled with blitzkrieged
orifices, adipose titration. Moon at
worn regales; the ink its sail. Plastered
on the mesa & pacing fifty leagues
anon. (*We thought we might be better*

then.) You try to jump ahead, but fall
behind, dropped back but are conspicuously
frames. The falters make no better
flitters, along the oak and toggled plane.
Basically beserk, the body with only
organs relies upon a
peacock's prickly prudery; then
resents what will not relent. Spilt
or gided. For guilt is the burden of the whitewashed
man: for what has not been done and what cannot be
undone. "Where there is sorrow there is
holy ground." The sink cracks, the
furl falters, and Everyperson bastes its
stew. Darting and then carted; filled with
or unacquainted by. Who feeds the farmers
cornered by a row of sediment, cooled
erotics of unsublimated stokes. He
speaks but does not offer, scarcely
sweats before he swings: there is no
denouement for pebbles or for wings.
Of course, it *is* an honor to be sprinkled
out, not that it's a evanescent one: I
dislike the form and in most phases would
not see the point in, to make stab at.
That's fine, did you notice, seems an
extraordinary, if it is in, however, for
reasons that now can't see to reply
to–stupid & wildly derange –decided
at least is a register, is having (dubious

distinction) though as you know the lack of,
loose extension, style of support, is
segmented beyond the pale. Will lessen: I
decline: one could: at least: there are:
that will: when may: though is: you
should: that might: is obvious: possibly
substantive: worthwhile bothering. The
concurrent and multiple variables affecting the flow
of the construction stream can easily . . . Loss of
pleasure in all or almost all or nearly mostly
all; unresponsive to usually pleasurable . . .
An situation amounts, the fledgling recriminations
that border on beautification: a constituency
of tissue and marrow and formaldehyde. Many
disputes involve opinions and facts
about stipulations that occurred over months
and years. Everyone does not feel well-
treated–the same slap applicated with
the fine measure of meager interdiction, ignorance
of extent. For instance, your actions seem
divisive and policing of the very "community"
you desire to support. Nothing represents
anything. Billboards poster our losses. Better
jeer than leer. Waking up at least two hours
early, body movements slow or agitated, excessive
or inappropriate feelings of self-reproach.

That's the major
problem we always
have in this

country. We don't
have a totalitarian
society where we

suppress the opposition.
We have an
information glut and

we bury the
opposition under piles
of newsprint that

all say the
other thing. So
our side gets

to get a
critical review in
The Guardian, whereas

the other side
gets to get
a laudatory review

on the front
page of the
Times Book Review.
[Michael Meeropol]

Overactive, talkative, pressured speech; racing
thoughts, flights of ideas; inflated self-
esteem; need no sleep; easily distracted; judgment
wasted. The Westside wail of words. Steam
pours onto the subway platform as crowd hangs back
of turnstile waiting to see if trains will
run. Two feet canary, team fleets of
aquamarine. For all the talk about decentered I's
there's a lot of overbuilt egos. Like
lips passing in the Fright. (We thought

we might be better than.) Beyond any bromide
hidden in assumptions and retarded by lachrymose
perambulation, hollering for benefit when all
the swirl spies pleistocene maquettes. Where
during the time of the observance chortled
aboard a lack, preemptive to detain
maladroit possession, steamed at
what reposed, disheveled, on a fair
and merry query. As right is as and
just enclosure deeds the doing spun, so
bid departure, fore enamored, seeds
the sowing sunk. *They* asked me how I knew
a shade of blue was blue; *I*, in tune, re-
plied, when you've got two eyes, folks
return your fire. Hunted down or
hunting. Fabulous forsook, the code without
the signals. And who remembers Leon
Klinghoffer and forgets those with no names
or faces who perish without trace and
less sanction? The Lord looks on
those or these, but, deaf and dumb, gropes
at making signs of solids. Ignominious
restitution, a civilization unable to rise
as high as a gutter; yet kindness
makes fools glow with sedulous light
& the stunted grow incandescent. These
are the words we cannot hear, a language
of sighs. Here are the verbs we have
not curved, vested by sleight: cascade, retort,

vitiate, effloresce. Staccato deserts the ob-
ligato, amounts that turn against, in which
to spread, invaginated prescience before a
nod to cruise: pratfall or billy-
goated & bubbling up like whine.
The world we seek is wiped.
Sitting up, standing,
falling down. & the river turns
to slush & the slush
to shacks but there
is no encampment
& no prognostication for
a sail is a Dot & a
Rot is a shirt
& a lurch
devolves into twin
doves or antiquarian
swans
but more likely a
pigeon.
Clubbed by stupidity
intoxicate of
stupefaction. Coming on like
gangbusters and then just
banging. (We thought
we might be . . .) Alerted,
flushed, remanded to
reminders. "He took so much
disparity," she said. "He was

so grave attending the . . ."
Milkweed
or filched rudders
(rubbers).
The ghost of a semblance of a
dive. Altered, adiabatically foregone.
Rosy-fingered hiccups, polyglot
hibiscus. "At the time, I was troubled
that poets could neither tell readers the name
of the device dispensed nor possible side
effects. Now, if you care to think about
it, even advising a reader to give
aspirin to a fevered child involves a
complicated series of æsthetical and ethical choices."
May philosophers, December social scientists. Having
completed the spadework on the lattice, she
took up, as one might a pair of spectacles, the long-jammed
plan of village of R——, in the county of
P——, professing no more than an historical
interest in a rumored subterranean passage
that connected the village to its
remonstration. Never abandoning fury for curiosity
self-aggrandizement for repulsion. Howevers which
adorn multifoliate pummelling, hung by
plunge and agglutinated with tetradactyls.
Sumptuous sunder (rife with rips). "Sawyer
called it transference, I call it baloney."
Dovetails with
apologia, garlic press. "I'll

tell you this, Sam, you've
got some serious problems that require
professional help." Galvanized
Gargantua, doppler of sudden *zeitgeist*. Sunless
in the sun. For each of us
must decide the level of response
we can afford to give readers in their quest
for truthful, accurate information. Benevolent
deception, partial truths, white lies, and other
forms of circumvention should not be ruled
out. If readers come to us for authoritative guidance,
it is important that we not disappoint them–or they
will turn to other, less reliable, media. "I
just can't hit that number
worth a damn." Garden-
variety effluvium.
When guest is seated, go to door and ring
bell twice. Slow boat to Bayonne, big bust in
Saskatoon. Elementary tuning porch. Who
waves the flaccid flag, downing a silvery
flask, and wrests cacorythmias from
a nest of horns. *Bleat, bleat don't*
you know the shoals. (We thought . . .) Still
the joust has made its recapitulation and the Trout
fills the hall: skies of pomegranates and a
ceiling of guffaws. Along alighted melodies
that . . .
Something there is that doesn't love a
pawn, that wants it smashed, and that its pawning

for. As if
a runner might o'ertake her strife
and patch the lost, unstrap this pediment
of feeling's long and agate train. Much
as you say, to start, at least unconsciously
familiar (usual bulging): but the, we did,
was a, she managed, and how, every time.
Or rolled over, onto something (alchemical
projectile), schmaltzed up with predictable
thrashing. Upstairs for; or is so in the meantime you
can actually precondition, have trouble with, as you–
quote–to absorb roughhouse, endless transfer inflicted
in passing out (but toneless) exoneration. Yesterday
I got, I became, I couldn't understand, I
should be finishing, or some such function as
a viper. Both because and because. Like
the idea of soon, excerpting plans who asked
to duplicate in terms of expanding, since
if, which have been part of, was news
to me. Weird and Red! Though, for example, they
say 'Baltimore' different in 'Boston'.
Studiously unprepared (oxymoronic
modesty). Like
loss that melts, topical
glaciers make their move. "There's
a bay inside o' Heaven
made of spray, mazed with crepe
& it's acommin' for us
couple o' days, aft a long haze."

The antimonophysite heresy: management
refuses responsibility for personal belongings checked
with management. Saucy sailing, bossy
commiseration–before the point is dry.
Fecundly familiar, incontinent supplication.
But not, according to Myron O'Mally; the
bored haberdasher denied any involvement
in the multimillion dollar confidence
confection. Roasting the Host, toasting the boast.
As trippingly entreaties us to linger, where
hushed in the calm of plums, a votive
respirator hums. Humungous desolation, lodged
at flotilla and superannuated fortnightly.
Suppurating bombast (lain along the lane, the
lady lit a Lucky). When I arrived
the reader was lying
flat on the bathroom floor
without any clothes
and complaining of
severe logorrhea. These are
the criteria I have tried to get
out from under
insofar as they would lead to
tighter analogies, less rhetorical
affect. Furthermore, we
are simply miles apart
flatulently wrong
bad bit of deflecting–because you support, on
that topic, no more

about as themes
which well up against this
(tiresome allegation) to
a place like Sovereign Privilege
(sense of from) go in
the direction of, link
constrained.
True I do load
on a spectrum more
than peripheral, and also
more germane as a sweeping
without swaying. Unbridgeable gulf
by a long shot.
Clear crystal adipose tissue. For
example, yesterday I refused to sell a man
a capon. Mule
of a guy. At dusk,
a dullard's thoughts turn
to dinner. Always
wants what's out of
reach. The search
for nonproverbial language:
child sticks finger
in crank. Suppose
your tooth hurt.
Get dressed, descend the ladder.
(Later.) To be among such constitutive & fibrous
fathers & be so slaphappy. *The world we seek*
was swiped. (We thought we . . .) & rushing

headfirst into the saltmines of the heart. On
the other hand, you can always spend more time
improving your chess. Romanticism is
analogic, modernism is digital. Marxianism
with a tiny middle-class face. "I got
bowls coming out of my ears." "There's
a three-inch opening in the incinerator." &
the Heart of Africa bleeds black blood. Every
day of apartheid dwarfs (every
slash of entitlements mocks)
the grief for
seven dead star warriors. Logic
skates on the brain, reason
weighs
on the mind.
Once
I
saw
a
man
walk
into
a
pole.
"You're like an uncooked nerve."
From amniotic fluid to
semiotic
fluidlessness. Semi-
arctic; infra-

papillary. Semi-idiotic. Semi-automatic
nosedive. Baby
Doc's dead! Death
to all tyrants
who feast
on the misery
of the people!
Illusion or
myth?
When reason swells
with repose then love is scorched
flight.
Some
like it
popped.
"Haiti? Isn't
that where Richard Burton made one of his
movies?" "Every
Jew a .22." Blinking, mumbling
sprawling. "Don't
eat so fast, people will think
you're hungry." Crazy Eddy's
Martin Luther King Day Portable Stereo
Sale. Sondheim
slumped on a sofa in his Manhattan
townhouse. "The important thing isn't
the parties you join but the parties you
make." Or, a shell game's better
than no game. When

the Messiah comes, the rust
will fall from the scales
on our eyes. *Some*
like it cracked. Doubled
over with second guesses.
"Just tell me what you want."
Stove-top denunciations, roving bands of
expectation. For God is
scales not vapor: each day its
dew (a portmanteau in every curlicue).
"I've done everything in my power to make this palatable."
In the priestless churches of San Juan Chamula (the
sentence will not end). Asking,
Where are the Bickfords of yesteryear, where
the Schrafft's? While in the back corridors of time, where
nothing is lost, the crowds swarm Lundy's at Sheepshead
Bay. We (who?) thought to build a diadem
& kicked against the slates by which
each is measure & found wanting what
is ready at hand but grasped too hard.
Better than this puncture's pride at punching, to
find a deck of turns, a float of
tufts, & prattle sightlessly among the chaise-
lit lawns.

LORINE NIEDECKER

"Knee Deck Her Daisies:" Selections from her Letters to Louis Zukofsky

Niedecker and Zukofsky's 40 years of regular correspondence began in 1931 and ended, with her death, in 1970. What remains of the letters–a much edited proportion of their original bulk–offers a fascinating look at close friendship and shared poetic enterprise. Niedecker's letters make compelling reading in themselves. They are also the only substantial surviving prose history of her poetic career up to 1964.

The small selection[1] that follows provides a glimpse into Niedecker's literary practice–her affiliations and enthusiasms, her influences, sources and methods. Through this run the seasonal currents of life on Black Hawk Island–the source of her locally nurtured poetic sensibility. As in the poems, accounts of domestic contingencies abut reflections on politics and philosophy; the domestic overlaps with the literary. There are affinities of style and substance between the letters and the poems, the letters often accessories to the poetry. Some carry the germ of a poem, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps as a deliberate testing and framing of thoughts and words. Others carry incidental cues for poems.

Zukofsky is Niedecker's artistic life-line and her closest friend. She adored all three Zukofskys and for a while held something like honorary family status among them. At times, however, one senses caution behind her intimacies and an excess of deference. The friendship may not always have been easy but the letters provide plentiful signs of a vigorous and productive literary collaboration.

Niedecker repeatedly acknowledged her debt to him. With characteristic good humor she wrote to Clayton Eshleman: "Koch, Ashbery–there but for the grace of God and Louis Zukofsky go I" (Feb. 14, 1968). Debts aside, her honed, thrifty poems are a substantial and independent achievement. Her free-wheeling, prolix letters are their complement.

Notes

[1] For permission to quote from the unpublished letters, thanks are due to Cid Corman, Niedecker's literary executor, to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, and to the Fales Library, New York University. Successive editings by Niedecker and Zukofsky reduced her side of the correspondence to letters and fragments that now number approximately 600 typed pages. No letters have survived from the 1930s, few from the mid and late 1950s, and no more than 10 after 1964.

Niedecker edited his side of the correspondence down to roughly 400 typed pages. She had hoped to publish them but Zukofsky refused permission. All the remaining letters are now at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

*

Those of the letters that survive only in fragments are marked in the text. My cuts are shown by an ellipsis. [ ]

*

dated by LN: Labor Day
dated by LZ: 1944
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Our woiks[1] are sealed in a big envelope ready to be mailed off tomorrow. The Decker-Niedecker deal should soon take place.

I take notice of your revised Anews with joy, especially the mote of sun and the cigarette. I re-read today Till we have died, and Fire Summer and oh lord, the book for me, and all that we live for beyond food and bed will be these two.

Notes

[1] Niedecker's *New Goose* and Zukofsky's *Anew* were both published in 1946 by James Decker Press, Prairie City, Illinois. Niedecker had typed both manuscripts.

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dated by LN: Sunday
dated by LZ: Apr. 29/45
fragment, tls.

Dear Bugs:

Was happy to hear from the home front, Celia! You know about the airplane spotter who said: "I've got 30 planes cornered." Too bad Did[1] has colds. Has Luigi come out of his weekend woik? Come up to the dandelions, Zu, and say goodbye to April, wasn't much good anyhow. I made a scoop, Celia–our town

has two stocking mills, one has opened a store and seconds in 8 1/2 and 9 sell for 3 for a dollar. I like to wear ankle socks in summer but this would be a little early.

What kinda music are ya on now in Perry?[2]

Oh me, the junction with the Reds! Did you hear Molotov's voice on radio? If only the translator's voice had been as strong and convincing as M's. One of the Russians who first greeted the Americans at the junction said, "This is a great holiday for the whole world." Robertson's American crew on the evening before, sat down on the other side of the Mulde "disappointed and confused because our cub planes hadn't picked up any big road movements and we didn't know just where in the hell the Russians were."

The lettuce I planted on April 7 froze on April 27. So we start all over again. However, the radishes are coming along just the same. B.P.[3] observes that you can't keep some things from growing.

Yes, I know, you've told me about the tonsils. Well, I'll see by going to a couple of doctors in the late summer. I know the sinus and perhaps something else is worse than the tonsils. Have my haid removed, I guess.

Last night we were sitting here and I was reading and B.P.'s voice came out of the void: "Some good binding material here." I looked and saw nothing. Finally she explained that Henry had brought home bananas, potato chips, cheese and crackers. How do things stack up and cohere by you?

Reading Diderot: Interpreter of Nature. This is what I could have used long ago, alongside Engels and while I was wondering what Emerson was getting at. A great many of my questions are suddenly answered. I really begin to believe that there is another life for us after we die, one not like ours, at least not for a long, long time. Elements for awhile before we again become, if we ever do, another mass. Time is nuttin in the universe. The elephant may be on his way to becoming a worm, and vice versa, as a species, I mean. All of which I wanted to say in my poem but didn't quite. "Fontenelle's rose saying that within the memory of a rose no gardener had been known to die." (This is the loveliest and most important thing I've read in a long time.) If we knew more chemistry and physics I'd have more faith. Only thing about death–loneliness for those that are left, but that's present anyhow.

And if the sun went out, Diderot says, and another kind of earth in time came back with another sun, probably even the same scattered elements as we now have or had, would not give the same results, "because everything is connected [end of fragment]

Notes

[1] Did, Diddy, Diddle–childhood names for Paul Zukofsky, a violinist from an early age. "Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle . . ."

[2] Celia Zukofsky's music for *Pericles*.

[3] Niedecker and Zukofsky referred to her mother, Daisy, as B.P., an abbreviation of *Bellis perennis*.

---

dated by LN: Sunday May 19
dated by LZ: /46
fragments, tls.

Dear Zu:

. . . Zu-Zu look what Williams said[1] enclosed! Air mail! It's really nice, isn't it?–anyhows he can't say that about everybody's nowadays. And, after all, he needn't have said even as much–not everybody is a Zu. [ ] Would like to send a card with Thank you. I agree as to state of poetry generally. Hope you have a good recovery from the operation. Wdn't want him to think he had to answer again. Yes, I'll write him just that much today. [end of fragment]

Mrs. Main the bird woman (granddaughter of Kumlien) came one day this past week and took me with her down through the woods where we used to live, to look at birds. It was so beautiful! The small trees we left there three years ago already seem big. The red osier dogwood and the other kind (pannacle) are so big and luxurious this spring (and now I know what kind of shrubbery I want around my place–can get roots from our own land where we now live). While looking at some white gulls (herring) along came a daddy-long-legs, as BP says (the great blue heron). We just gasped. Nice once again to be close to someone with some kind of enthusiasm, somebody with absolutely no kind of sophistication, or no pseudo–or super–. She had a little pad and pencil as she's preparing an article on birds at Black Hawk Island. When we came to Indian arrow head beside the path she'd jot down: arrowheads. We saw a purple martin feeding its young about two weeks ahead of schedule but on acct. of housing shortage they moved in fast and did their stuff, I guess. She always had to *see* the birds to appreciate 'em whereas I

knew by their sound what they were and knowing what their colors were in my mind, was happy enough. I showed her the willows at the point and what would be by August the cucumber (wild cucumber vines) village which would protect the pheasants in hunting season and provide them with seeds. I told her about all the bank swallows settling on the roofs last fall wanting to get inside from the storm, and that after a thundershower the yellow head black birds come on to the lawns and walk around among the dandelions–looks like the dandelions were walking. She said: that's nice! And put it down on her little pad! She'll begin to think I've got some talent with words!! (no I don't suppose she knows anything about my writing, that I do) But I think it's best for her not to know and best for me. She has a lovely literary style, simple and so sincere.

So–and when I got Williams' letter of course I was happy. But we're all too tired to be breathless these days. Or we're breathless and nothing else. Ten years ago such a letter would have sent me higher than the great blue heron. Guess now I've got my feet on bombed ground.

Notes

[1] In a letter to Jonathan Williams on December 14, 1965, she recalls: "W.C. Williams wrote me after seeing New Goose: 'The book's a good one in the way I want books of poems to be good. It is good *poetry*. It is difficult and warm. It has a life to it.' And in 1952: 'I have always admired your work.'"

---

dated by LN: Sun. Jan. 12
dated by LZ: /47
fragment, tls.

The essay[1] to Diddy–I read it an know I've got some life yet–it's not so terse nor so quick as what chuh wrote ten years ago but it's lovely, lovely. [ ] It's like part of an autobiography–well, that's it! I always keep forgetting–I'm in it! [ ] Almost every sentence holds the meaning of the whole essay. How Williams will love it. He as close to science as he is (or is it medicine??)–(no, he's close to the physical, tho) a wonder he hasn't written something like this–but he isn't so deeply intellectual.

I made a note to ask you–isn't it true that some poetry–and it can be good poetry–is not to be set to music? Or do you mean that all poetry is capable, if it's good, to be set to some kind of music?

Everything sings (or becomes some art form) if you want to find the measure & the continuity?

Funny–just reading Schorer on Blake–he's got to have a "myth" too. As Dostoevski said: The real is often fantastic enough.

The first moments of reading essay I was so excited and carried back to years ago when I first saw your writing in the Poetry issue.[2] In after years if they talk about me and ask "Was she ever in love", they'll have to say, "Yes, she was in love with Zukofsky's words." That Zukofsky print!

Notes

[1] "Poetry For My Son When He Can Read", *Cronos*, 2, no. 4 (March, 1948); rev. and rpt. in *Prepositions* (New York: Horizon, 1967).

[2] Zukofsky's guest-edited "Objectivist" issue of *Poetry*, 37 (February 1931).

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undated [1947]
fragment, als.

Was shovelling snow the other morning at 5.30 when big round moon was almost setting–just like night, bright moonlight, lovely [ ]. I burn my trash (waste from flood) on path to river in a spot bare of snow. Nights I hang over the porch filling my small oil can to fill oil heater. I go to folks for my drinking water as my own well water isn't clear yet–I'm not home enough to pump it to the stage fit for using. Drafty errands in becky, sharp but fair–love it all. An egg froze for me in my box on the porch but ate it anyway. A bit of life in the country, wut? How's your oil heater now? Why shd it refuse to work?

---

dated by LN: Sun.
dated by LZ: Xmas 1947
tls.

My dear Zu:

Here I am for a half hour–every time I wanted to say something to you I found it so good I worked it out further on note paper–my, my, you don't suppose the Muse is musingk?? . . .

Yes, I read newspaper at hotel from 7 to 8 mornings, my spirit as dark and unshaven as the hotel night clerk looks.

I see Chief So and So from Tahiti is visiting U.S. He says "I tell my people: plant more, love more and have more fun." I find he owns 400 hundred acres of land which somebody must indeed plant. Funny, if you smell imperialism, what a different reflection it puts on things . . . .

Love to youz, Diddooz
and Major Celia-in-a-new-key
from my little kitchen
table overlooking 600
acres of marsh. The Brontes
had their moors, I have
my marshes!
[ ]
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Sunday Apr. 11
dated by LZ: /48
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Tell Celia I clean house nights like she does. It seems such a waste of daytime.

---

dated by LZ: May 23/48
fragment, tls.

I see now what you mean in the Wire home: It is always Christmas in the air at night;[1]–now that I've flown–I don't believe I got it before–cd. have been about God, LL.D. (wish Emily Di. could see that) and you know, by the way I had begun something embodying the conversation with Glover, so when you write "Regards to Glover"-jiggers, there's my title. [ ] and now when I see the second line of

God, LL.D: "Only sometimes does one feel that intimate"—Zu, could I use it and quote it? Maybe I should re-write the same idea, tho, because if yours becomes famous, there'll be the feeling of the joke about it?? . . . [end of fragment]

You know something–I don't know how the old time poets did it–the poetic vein was the soft-spoken, hushed, sweet-worded kind of thing, almost artificial, but maybe in their time it was earthy enough for poetry . . . now I find when one hasn't been writing for awhile, you start off in something like that soft vein, but as soon as you get used to writing again, you pick up everything for poetry, get into everyday speech etc.

Notes

[1] Zukofsky's "Light", *All*, p. 125:

Wire home:

It is always
Christmas
From the air
At night;

"So, He
really
Lived?"

---

dated by LZ: 6/19/48
fragment, tls.

Wish I had a couple weeks more at home. But I made the best of it. A little marshy, soggy piece west of the house that one could almost call the primordial swamp . . I cut grass there and planted willows, my eyes to the green ground so much that I can almost feel sea-water in my veins[1] . . . little things like algae, fine-haired weeds mixed with large-blade grass, and I think: Equisetum–little fern-like plants with hollow stems–imagine that!–if equisetum is its name–like the guy that found out he had spoken prose all his life. Lots of wild mint where I wanted to mow (with corn knife) but I wouldn't, such sweet little things. Every time I go down there with the intention of mowing I come back without doing it–and I guess my little willows will grow anyhow. I took a walk down a long path beside tall willows out to where the hunters get into their boats for mud lake–thousands of willows shoulder high with reddish leaves toward the tops–I simply pulled 'em out by the roots and lugged 'em

home for my own beginning of creation. I worked all yesterday at this and walked miles within a short space. BP went with me on one jaunt. We saw wild sweet peas (bluish purple and much smaller than tame ones) entwined around the tall grasses, the coolest, freshest looking thing. Yes, June is a good month for you to come some day. Diddy's fireflies too. I am rereading Peattie–remember some notes I sent you once?–latest research, he says, shows that bacteria on the firefly cause the light? Luminous bacteria. Symbiotic relationship. Probably the light is not for sexual advantage at all. More like the luminous fungi that sometimes grow on trees. The bacteria on fireflies may not be necessary to the latter's existence, but do them no harm. Continuing with Peattie–"Good poetry is swift-winged, essential and truthful description–and so is good science." Suzzle.

I discover something–Henry[2] uses trees so much of the time, to mark boundary lines. So I ask: To whom do they belong? So he says: well, I don't know–who cares?–and what do you want to do with trees anyway–they'll always stand– Maybe, it's the beginning of socialization! [end of fragment]

Yes, I'll send you a red dogwood root in the fall, Zu, when it's dormant. I never thought of it for your garden because our land is low and moist, but we'll try it and you'll maybe have a bit of Koshkonong there. Enclosed is a sample of dogwood bloom and stem.

Notes

[1] Similar lines appear in her late poem, "Paean to Place":

> You with sea water running
> in your veins sit down in water....
> [*My Life By Water*, p. 19]

[2] Niedecker's father.

---

dated by LN: June 22 [1948]
tpcs.

Dear Zu:

Saturday I arose from my primordial mud with bits of algae, equisetum, etc . . to attend an expensive church wedding. Whole of history went thru my head, a big step from algae to CHURCH (for some people there can be no procreation without the Church!)*, from cell division to the male sweating it out while the other collects International Sterling Silver and dons and takes off

satins and continues to sweat to pay for 'em. The little slave girl bride and the worse slave, her husband.

The killdeer still sitting on the eggs. The much vaunted Instinct in nature may be going astray.

This morning in 100% humidity my hair went straight and a certain angle in the mirror I looked like Taft. If I don't look out I'll be Mac A. with a pipe in my mouth.

'bye
Lorine

*and International Sterling.

Notes

Niedecker's poem "I rose from marsh mud" condenses the subject matter of this postcard and of the previous letter.

I rose from marsh mud,
algae, equisetum, willows,
sweet green, noisy
birds and frogs

to see her wed in the rich
rich silence of the church,
the little white slave-girl
in her diamond fronds.

In aisle and arch
the satin secret collects.
United for life to serve
silver. Possessed.

[*My Life By Water*, p. 66]

---

dated by LZ: r'cd Nov 9/49
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Your poems![1] The W one—perfect perfect perfect [ ]! HD's exquisiteness plus Williams' maleness plus LZ's music, wit, modern life. HD has come close to its sensitivity–yes, it's all three of you. I place this next to the short one in Anew about a sense of passing in the grass. And the other one–we've got Homer on our minds! – that's LZ like HD could never write it (she never seems directly now, living in the present whirl)–and "philosophy"–yes, you say you sat up till three o'clock–I sat on a thought not too dissimilar for a week but going to bed at nine (how do you hold up beyond nine?)

and waking up at three for an hour or so (these nights in bright moonlight) does about as well for me.

But Ph.Ds. Something like what Celia said about the man who put up those screens when I was there two years ago–anyway workmen who earn so much and leave a screen hanging away from the window need better understanding, better seeing. You and I are being squeezed between the expensive workman and the capitalist. Neither wants the type of thing we have to offer. I worried and worried how to say this without saying it in III of the enclosed (its middle section) and then decided to put it as is. No, those two are fighting it out and I hope the worker wins but where does it get us now and a long time after the victory?

Notes

[1] Zukofsky's "Chloride of Lime and Charcoal" part III, *All*, p. 134.

---

dated by LZ: Nov 30/49
fragment, tls.

Warm sunny day with
a trifle snow on ground

Dear Zu:

Hope the shakes are gone. Long underwear–ye gods, at last some sense! [ ] Got pyjamas?? Plumber is paid, tho. Charcoal, lime, etc . . .

Well, I shoulda sent for the circular re. Ridge Memorial[1]–is it small enough for you to send to me in a letter? [end of fragment]

Yes, yours need punctuation marks sometimes i.e. intellectual–still, let the reader get what he will–and he won't get much more with the marks. Take Williams-all his dashes–when all is said and done the lines between the dashes are still there. Prose must have marks. Has Cummings written something about it? Poetic thoughts don't rest in our minds with punctuation in 'em. Thought–in poetry *may* be something.

I see what you say "don't have to bother with punctuation if the form is inevitable"—I guess you've got something there. [ ]

Notes

[1] Lola Ridge Poetry Contest of the Poetry Society of America. Zukofsky won second prize for "Chloride of Lime and Charcoal".

---

dated by LZ: 3/6/50
fragment, tls.

A winter evening in Wisconsin — I arrived home against a 50 mile icy west wind with a scarf tied over my face to find my oil barrel almost dry (the next day was the day for the oil man to come) and my cistern pump in the kitchen frozen. I looked in my drinking water pail and hardly a drop there so I turned around and went to the folks with two pails, one for soft water and one for hard. Coming back the water splashed out and it was like standing up on the deck of a ship in a storm. My house was 46 and I turned up the heat. I went out to tip the barrel and turn on the faucet and hold the oil can under it all three things with two hands in the wind and squeezed out enough oil for the night. Supper was partaken with boots and scarf on. When it got up to 60 in the house with a wave of air pulsing through the three west windows I started to clean house in the one little room where I keep my clothes. I kept warm working. About ten o'clock I got through and decided to eat a dish of baked beans and catsup–cap on the catsup bottle wouldn't come off no matter how much I tapped and turned. Crawled into bed, practically under it, said good-bye to the world about eleven. New Directions Eleven. But Saturday spring came and flies on the window. Doesn't look like we'd have high water this spring, thank god for that. A week in a dingy hotel room with all that expense would plunge me into the depths. I remember 3 yrs. ago or was it 4–I went to hotel and wrote you–will there be a war with Russia?

–Lorine

---

dated by LZ: Aug 2/50
fragment, tls.

The flood is subsiding and maybe the monsoon has passed. The birds and animals came close, practically inside the house because on two sides I had only a couple of feet of land. A flood in the summer

here is like a tropical jungle. The Amazon flowed through just in front of my thick growth of dogwood. Here a large (very fat) muskrat swam–they seem to swim with their noses as that's what you notice first–and came out in shore to sun himself. What's more wet looking when it's wet than a rat? My family of king rails worked for food, whacking at little crab-like things sailing along but rails are really very shy. Once a rabbit and a rail were eating away both absorbed, looking down–suddenly they came face to face and both jumped back. Rabbits not having bills are quite peaceful creature –always nibbling–it's wonder there's any grass left in this world. I seem to have planted my gladioli for them. Living in the teeming tropics under jungle law I wasn't surprised one morning to find two blood spots on my cement steps and not far away a decapitated young rabbit. I had turtles too ofcourse in my mud flat– I can't be sure of the difference between their noises and bull frogs' but I think it's turtles that have that deep thing, always three times, from evening to two in the morning. I'd wake up in my sleep and wonder what all those dogs were doing barking around my house. One day there was a water spaniel (rhinoceros) plowing through–I soon got him out of there with my cannon like voice and much clapping of hands (bring-'em-back-alive-Niedecker) as every time a dog gets excited over a bird and jumps on the soft lawn he leaves a hole. Carp worked on the edge of the lawn and slapped the water in the night. Lots of snakes of course, one disporting himself on a young willow like Spanish moss. I notice frogs get eaten in quantities by almost everything. Mozart's Air and Chopin much too delicate for this country but beautiful moonlight nights.

---

dated by LZ: R'cd Feb 5/51
tls.

Dear Zu:

22 below zero — o a couple of mornings ago it was 38 below. Henry takes it into his head he wants buckwheat pancakes (genuine buckwheat flour) like the old sourdoughs had in the lumber camps of other days and other belows. So I'll make them, I know how. I'll put the yeasty batter to rise over night on top shelf of my bookshelves – on the floor it would turn to ice. The other day when it was terribly windy I took a book down and through the space where it was came the cold wind![1] And it's all settled in my hip . . . .

The new poem[2]–I'm studying on it [ ] sounds beautiful, like the rhyme very much, funny but its tone, mood, color, sound, movement–I'd feel it had something to do with Plato without knowing that it does. I read the myth–the poem has a meaning, a super-sense, not meaning in the ordinary sense–I feel it's very wonderful [ ]. You're a poet nobody can paraphrase. Zu-Zu . . . .

Have decided I must do something folky for the next section of For Paul. Only it's getting so you go almost anywhere for it but to the people–in their barbarity[3]-no wonder I keep going to the birds and the animals.

Keep warm
Lorine

Notes

[1] Later in the month she wrote a poem that begins:
February almost March bites the cold.
Take down a book, wind pours in. Frozen –
[*My Life By Water*, p. 70]

[2] Possibly "Pamphylian", *All*, p. 140.

[3] From "In the great snowfall before the bomb" written for Group 2 of "For Paul":
I worked the print shop
right down among em
the folk from whom all poetry flows
and dreadfully much else.
[*My Life By Water*, p. 61]

---

dated by LZ: Sept 28/51
tls.

Dear Zu:

Don't look at my poems this week and maybe not next–you won't have the time [ ] I'll wait. Write on my notes, that last page.

Taine title–nevermind him, I don't know titles, understand he was good for his day on economics. Oh yuss, and if you are presented with Wm's Autobiography, you'll let me read it sometime? Yes, someday I'll write your biography with your help–your LN note[1] in A-12–guess you never actually told me that but in essence the same. If you–when you come here and read your letters to me–excerpts I've kept (on general topics more or less as I've explained to you, nothing that could bring embarrassment to anyone–you'll see what a wonderful man of literature you really are! . . .

You're on the run—so run carefully and wait for my stuff till your breath comes easily . . . .

Thanks for Bottom – will copy soon.
Lorine

Notes

[1] Dear L.N.

So your mother's dead. Today's
such a cool blue day the kind that
follows what we have all of life to
think about — Each writer writes
one long work whose beat he cannot
entirely be aware of. Recurrences
follow him, crib and drink from a
well that's his cadence – after
he's gone. What struck you, as
I think you meant, choppy in
"A", 13 years or so back when
I tried hard for the "fact", I
reread sometimes to tie in with
what goes on now, and the "fact"
is not so hard set now as a paradigm.
I have to reread several times
to find out what I meant. Only
after a while, with no pen in hand,
does the "fact" I wanted come
back – a sort of perennial-annual.
What else can you tell me? I wish
you would so I may know.
[*"A"*-12, pp. 214-5]

---

dated by LZ: Rec'd Feb 14/52
tls.

Dear Zu:

The Jameses[1] is your valentine from me, I guess! *Wd.* you, dear Zu, return it to me as then I won't have to make two more copies, only one?

Before I go further–your valentine poem[2]–Oh, I sat there and luxuriated–"the fine private luxury of each" as HJ might say! I forget what poetry is till I read you again. Those last three lines–how *do* you: pierce the heart with beauty. I often get carried along by rhyme to come out with such (somewhere near) an ending, and you

must get a lot of your suggestion (thought) from the same? The first time I read it I didn't realize it was rhyme, tho. Ah, I put this one beside Little hands,[3] the still sense in the grass, Fire summer . . . .

To get back to tea and crumpets with the Jameses. You see, the main source, The Jameses by Matthiessen is not in chronological order, doesn't give a *story* of their lives, just whatever biographical material you get from quotes from letters–M. shows their style, the style of each, their writings, their effect on society and literature. I think he goes more into the *life* of HSr. than the others–the effect he had on his children's writings–writings again, rather than their lives.

I had to imagine the actual scenes tho the mass of material from letters gives me plenty to work on. Except Alice's suicide–M. thought it was due to her being the youngest and only girl in that over-vital family. What I have used there except the pencilled part is from three sentences father put into a letter . . . .

Radio *should* be a good medium for poetry–speech without practical locale. Stage with all its costumes and place and humans tripping about too distracting sometimes. Poetry and poetic drama–suggestion–the private page plus sound and silence. I remember when MacLeish and Norman Corwin were so excited about radio. It doesn't pay, that's all!

Alice, did I tell you before?–made an entry in her journal only a couple of weeks before her death, about Emily Dickinson: "It is reassuring to hear the English pronouncement that Emily Dickinson is fifth-rate–they have such a capacity for missing quality; the robust evades them equally with the subtle. Her being sicklied o'er with T.W. Higginson makes one quake lest there be a latent flaw which escapes one's vision." This was in 1891 or beginning of 1892 . . .

Another party at Henry's–I didn't go–all day until about 10 in the evening. His birthday. My cousins, two families, came and brought the meals. What a life I'd have if I lived with him.

Lorine

Notes

[1] Niedecker's two-act radio play about the James family, "Taste and Tenderness", of which only Act 1 scene 3 survives.

[2] Zukofsky's "On Valentine's Day To Friends", *All*, p. 141.
[3] "Little wrists", *All*, p. 122.

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dated by LN: May 22
dated by LZ: /1952
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Rainy day with yellow warblers and wild canaries glinting about. All my bushes are in bloom now, honeysuckle, dogwood and Japanese Quince. To say nothing of a lawn full of dandelions. I planted my garden full of flower seeds and a couple of rows of lettuce. I don't like getting up and down but once I'm down I like sitting on my haunches . . . .

---

dated by LZ: June 11/52
fragment, tls.

. . . I have my kitchen casement window open. A tree near it gives me some wonderful music sometimes–right now it's a Baltimore Oriole and the sound seems tunneled in. You'd swear the bird was in the kitchen. Singularly pure, as HJ would say. I get song sparrows that way, wrens, cardinals, northern yellowthroats.

Fireflies at night, brilliant flash this year, atomic, I guess . . . .

---

dated by LN: July 8, 1952
fragment, tls.

Dear Zu:

Well, your letter, criticisms etc. have given me some long moments. [ ] The check too [ ] I'll keep it and use it for copyright and photostat. Soon as I can I'll return it.

I wish you had gone into the permission of pub. I feel that they'll take one look at the play and think: an adaptation. And they'll throw it out. Wonder if I cd. say something like this: This is an original play based on material from (and list two books) I could leave it at that. No doubt they'll be wondering, if I haven't quoted and whether I got permission . . . .

I'm fixing up What's the hour–ten o'clock etc . . . exciting . . . Oh me, how did I ever get on to such a hard thing as poetry, and to bothering a hard (pressed) LZ? [ ]

I'm really in a vein if I can direct it better.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: July 12
dated by LZ: /53
tls.

. . . Accent takes two of LZ's poems! Gosh, I wish he'd end this suspense re. The Poetry of LZ[1] and answer. I begin to wonder if he ever got it. Wonder wut's up, people comingk to see you. Leila Leipzig and co. around? I'm shaking in suspents. I have to smile at something you said to me in a letter a few months ago before telling me about your letter editing project, I guess:

> "Forget it tho I tell it to you
> and say nothing to no one
> not even to me
> unless some luck attends it.
> Then I will to you."

I put it into verse lines. ! [ ] . . . .

Aristoph. in the line spoken by Father in Clouds: "Well, well Thought draws the essence into watercress." Sounds like LZ in

serious mood.

To the Adirondack Greeks
from the lowland leek — of the lily family, tho.
Lorine

Notes

[1] Niedecker's essay on Zukofsky's poetry was published in *The Quarterly Review of Literature* 8 (April, 1956) pp. 198-210.

---

dated by LN: Nov 16 [1953]
apcs.

Dear Zukies:

OK–see you–the man made out tickets for Penn. instead of N.Y. Central but the time is the same. Yes, a cab to Willow St. I have 3 hrs to spend in Chicago so will go to Art Institute. Friday night we played Chopin records at McAllisters and when it came to Chopin waltzes we danced! Families are wonderful! [ ]
Lorine

---

dated by LZ: Apr 27/54
fragment, als.

Northern water thrush in my back yard. Last night, very warm, frogs making the air jump, a whippoorwill sounding that plaint for an hour or so. (It must be nice *never* to get tired of your own song.)
[ ] Lorine

---

dated by LZ: c. March '55
fragment, als.

Strings of geese going over–thunder in the distance and spiders starting to crawl – Lorine

---

dated by LN: July 4
dated by LZ: /55
tls.

. . . If it's as hot there as here you can be glad you're home–would be cool down on the first–basement, I mean–floor? I'm supposed to go over to McA's where there are a dozen or so people milling around, for hot dogs etc. but I'll stay home with potato salad, green beans and pork chops and Bergson–just getting around to reading his Creative Evolution. Hoping some reading like this would set me going on a poem. Been so long since, as Henry James said, I've take a piece of paper into my confidence. Wish I had HJ's Sacred Fount here, I'd read it . . . .

Listen, send me Bottom if you want to and I'll type it – I'd love to, you can correct the first copy and then I'll make good ones . . . .

A complete poems of Emily Dickinson is coming out soon, they say. There will go my money. A biog. of Walter Savage Landor now out, wd. like it but costs $7.50, the kind of book that Marboro will handle for $2 in a year or two.

90 degrees now at noon –

'bye and don't hesitate about
the Bottom typing – wd. be wonderful for me.
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Aug. 14
dated by LZ: /55
tpcs.

Dear Travelers:

I traveled to a little place about 20 miles from Fort, to see cliff swallows' nests like mud bottles or gourds on sides of a barn. In spring the farmer ploughs up edge of a pond to be sure the birds have the material to build the nests. When you don't have a cliff use a barn.

Ask me (if I forgot) to tell you the story Santayana told Bertrand Russell about Avilla–it's too good to risk repetition.

Yes, No. 5, Black Mt. Rev.–Duncan says he likes intensity even if it's an intense muddle.

The McA's are out on the river riding skis. I'm in with Walter Savage Landor. His irony almost spoiled his poetry but I have to admit that's why I like him.

Hope you avoided Connie. Ladies are hurricanes these days.

Yrs – Lorine

---

dated by LN: March 19/56
dated by LZ: /56
fragment, tls.

Dear Louie:

I'm all right [ ]. I take down not my Bible but Marcus Aurelius and follow up with Lucretius and Thoreau's Journal (The Heart of) and why couldn't somebody like Thoreau–a whole family of him–have ever settled here near me? . . .

---

dated by LN: March 23
dated by LZ: /56
tls.

Dear Louie:

Can't find a postcard so –

Woke up to six quiet inches of snow overloading twigs, boughs, steps. We had no storm when you did but this instead of rain.

Was going to copy a page or two from Letters of Yeats for you but got started on a poem about my mother–this is her birthday and the snow and Marcus Aurelius and my overloaded loneliness [ ] and it's a temptation to write like Yeats, a kind of mellifluous, lush overloading (kind of folk element in it tho at that) but I must not. I should think he'd have commented at some time on Gerard Manley Hopkins but he didn't except to say he'd talked with Bridges' friend Hopkins. But he knew Pound and there is a strange allusion to Basil Bunting. P's mother-in-law Olivia Shakespear was one of his best friends and mention is made of Pound's son Omar. Was it Omar who was at Colgate when you were there? . . .

---

dated by LN: April 1
Easter Sun.
dated by LZ: /56
tls.

Dear Zukies:
The world is so busy rushing past my door on road and river that it makes me feel I'm going somewhere to write to Willow St . . . .

---

dated by LZ: Dec 1956
attached to manuscript of "For Paul and Other Poems", tls.

No hurry–put it aside till you feel like reading.

No red penciling–indicate by letter what's wrong if anything is.

I destroyed 2 new ones and keep back one concerning Aen that I wouldn't want to print, otherwise the ten or so you've never seen are included.

Question in my mind as to order–don't like the ballads mixed up with the serious–might make headings of groups i.e. Ballads–(whatever to call the more personal-original ones)–(and the 5-liners with 2 words rhyming [did I create a new form or cremate?–influence of haiku I suppose] which form I'll be using often from now on if you like it)

Should the title be FOR PAUL?? Yes, I guess so. Nice if whenever it's printed, Paul's handwriting: AND I ACCEPT–PAUL. Suzz? If he does accept!!

Believe one poem should be omitted from the For Paul section–Sorrow moves . . . .

Right-o
Lorine

O and each poem should be on a page by itself when printed, especially if there are no headings for the different kinds of verse.

---

dated by LN: Feb. 4
dated by LZ: /57
tls.

Dear Louie:

I should draw a picture of myself covered with dust mops, pails, kitchen cleanser, cloths, broom, etc. wondering where I am down those long halls past all those doors. Not really hard–the floor is, most important thing is to wear spongy soles. Arms and feet feel it. Noon hour not a working time but paid for it and given the meal so really 7 hrs. on time sheet. I take care of the dining room so far as cleaning but someone is always coming in to sit there and talk and I have to watch and wait till I can get back in to finish up before the next meal. Hospital convention bids me sit at table at coffee break in morning (15 min.) and at noon with other cleaning ladies–elderly cripples already drawing social security checks (they're allowed to earn a little money besides s.c.) but one of them is a woman I know–used to come down to see Runke–everyone trembles a bit before and

behind Miss Gobel, the Superintendent (and on Tuesday mornings I have to make her bed and dust her apartment–some things observed as senseless as the stiff white caps on the nurses' heads. Pretty democratic system, tho, at that–office girls on easy terms with cleaning women, at least with me, but I dunt keer[1]–what happens to me after I get home and a little rested and Sat. and Sun. is all that matters to me–have not been able to get hold of an anthology of Haiku from the Univ. Library.

Nice first stanza from an Andrew Marvell pome – ?:

Think'st thou that this love can stand
Whilst thou still dost say me nay?
Love unpaid does soon disband:
Love binds love, as hay binds hay.

Hay! Wonderful.

Weiss returns The Element Mother: "Perhaps you have cut away too much from these, at least we miss in them some of the cross-grained snazzy detail we enjoy in your work." ! I've sent ms to New Directions and there it will lie for some time, no doubt. Can you think of anywhere else to send it? I can't . . . .

Notes

[1] On February 1, 1957 Niedecker started work at the Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital. She retired in November 1963.

---

dated by LN: Zunday
mit no zun
dated by LZ: Mar 10/58
tls.

Hi:

. . . I like the Robert Creeley poems[1] you sent me–I'd be writing something like that if I weren't so form conscious–a heightened prose with a rather large rhythm, a slightly mystic, abstract way of getting reality across. I have to be more concentrated, tho I am beginning to worry about the five-line haiku-derived form that dogs me now, it doesn't fit everything. Maybe I am not object-minded enough, not minutely eye-seeing enough to fit a symbolism because you have

only a few words to use. When I read your concise, bare but sharp lines (lions), I think both Creeley and I are on the wrong track, the wrong hill, looking out and seeing everything and nothing.

Edward–o I like reading The Sorrows, he's a wonder. Of course I'd experience some wonder myself as I read along–is this true or is it myth? For me, when it comes to birds, animals and plants, I'd like the facts because the facts are wonderful in themselves. I hope he never goes so far agin things he doesn't like that he develops a narrow view. After all we do have sex and other appetites. If people didn't have even that kind of "love" how would they ever become as civilized as they are? I suppose he's pleading for sanity but I hope he doesn't miss something good when he does come upon it.

The business of loneliness–the mind has to be sharp to keep one from getting uselessly involved just for the sake of a moment of less loneliness. I have the Art News Annual, that large book you get from Marboro books at one-fourth the cost when it's a year old and I carried it to work one day thinking to ask the record librarian if she'd like to borrow it–she has a daughter in Milwaukee who paints. I didn't approach her, after carrying the thing there! I think they know they have a cleaning woman who is a little different from the usual, but it wouldn't do the slightest good to show them how different.

I wish I had a missionary quality–I could do some good in this community once I'd overcome their feeling that I was a freak. But Lord *no*.

Edward's "The Orient should have sent us missionaries."!

Wyndham Lewis (Time and Western Man) on Pound etc . . . yes, I see it all much better now–sometimes it takes a person years to really understand a thing if you miss out on some little explanation in the beginning. Lewis is not at all friendly to P. whereas I thought P had a great regard for Lewis and that therefore there was no real criticism of Pound in that early day–mid-twenties. I think that's why I still read so much–my education wasn't good enough in the first place. Of course another reason I read–I have to when I'm working, I get tired and away from literary thought and I'm amazed how I lose hold on my words, I forget spellings etc.

Are you all free of colds now? Hospital Zukofsky [ ].

Is a short poem boiling up now that March is here (and the east wind is cold??)–or is Bottom your main hot water bottle??

Zuzz
Lorine

Notes

[1] *The Whip* was published in 1957 by Migrant Books. Zukofsky may have shown her poems published in magazines such as *Black Mountain Review*.

---

dated by LN: June 1
dated by LZ: /58
tls.

. . . Cleaning the old cupboard I placed three books together that mean most to me–Marcus Aurelius, Thoreau's Walden and Japanese Haiku and standing beside them is Test of Poetry.

I require masses and masses of nature these days–little landscapes and wide ones
while I sit with all my trees and bushes –

Well, you're packing and
it's *forward, Californy*

Send me your address
there as soon as
parsible.
Lorine

---

dated by LZ: June 16/59
als.

Hi Zukies:
I've sent for the June [Poetry] issue. Goodness what an issue you describe. Yes that first line of the Robert Duncan poem to you–beautiful–I can hardly wait to see it–to play it on *my* lute.

There are words that rhyme but are never used together. You would never use lute with boot! Apropos of nothing. It's my reaction to drudgery–I'm now settled and sitting and heating myself occasionally with the organ-stove and looking at the philodendrons and the

new green draperies and the green cool clean rugs. What is so rare as a house in June! Celia, join me in a glass of home-port!

All my surfaces shine, a hard varnish shine but looks good to me, renewed table feet, doors etc after a flood. All my surfaces are hard, all my interiors, quiet and relaxing . . . .

I bought Pascal's Pensées in Madison–paperback–Be restingk my three faithfuls –

Lorine.

---

dated by LN: June 23 [1959]
apcs.

Louie!!

O thou lightsome, lovely song-maker! I do just delight in it. I *thought* you might take up the boot-lute rhyme! Lemme see– Birnbaum (baum means tree?), leaves, and kneedecker (Niedecker, shore) but daisies?–unless reference to BP? In my letter I mentioned neighbors by name of Decker had planted a rose bush? But it all sings in a skipping rhythm which I've never known you to use before, have I? Poifeck.[1]

Mexico! Nice–hot sun, brilliant colors and topped off by the plane ride. Good, good for PZ.

Tank you, Celia for typing the pome and be lazy, now, in Mexico.

Lorine

Notes

[1] From "Her Face The Book Of – Love Delights In – Praises", *All*, p. 210:

> Where She a breath
> Comes out of drudgery
> Notes a worked out knee deck her daisies
> And apropos of nothing
> 'there are words that rhyme but
> are never used together
> You would never use *lute* with *boot*' –
> So she has used them.

---

dated by LN: April 17
Easter
dated by LZ: /60
tls.

Dear Louie:

The worst snowstorm of the year is going on this 17th of April! I give up! I had just gone out–yesterday–and put down some boards between the house and the "little house" in the mud and last night around 1:00 I woke in a terrific rainstorm, got up and put my boots on and went out and picked up the boards. I don't want to lose them, need 'em after the flood is finally over. Most of my lawn is out, tho. I waded yesterday all around dislodging big blocks of wood, oil drums etc. After land comes out, you can't lift these heavy things but during a flood you just touch them with your little finger and they move. So at least I got 'em off my path to the river and the low parts of my lawn. Mud hens swam right along beside me. Was very warm, I knew some weather was brewing.

Weather is keeping pace with the black state of the world politically. Could it possibly have anything to do with nuclear tests?

---

undated [1961]
tpcs.

Dear Louie:

Strangest thing happened–book–I'll send or copy for you–(a Migrant pamphlet) by Ian Hamilton Finlay (collected poems), The Dancers Inherit the Party sent me from Ventura, Calif. By whom? Seems they must have known about New Goose. Slip attached says "For favour of a review"! *I* review it??? *No* but it will liberate poems in me, a half dozen of his will. Folk, wild, witty things. A few of his a trifle too weird for me. Also I find notice in one of yr. Poetry Mags of Cid's The Descent from Daimonji, so will send him $1 for it, perhaps $5, keep the "change" for the press.

I now have a second stanza of Glen Ellyn that's good (wild) but doesn't quite fit the first stanza.

O me–it must be midnight and I have to get up at 5:30.

L.

Costs 35c

---

dated by LZ: /61
tls.

. . . Corman's Descent from Daimonji. It's nice, isn't it? If only I'd be content with this kind of poetry. I have to get drama in it, sense of conversation, wit (I hope, don't always succeed maybe), but I'm conscious of so much more and yet the world is in this Corman and Oriental-like poetry. He seems to give an honest, quiet attention to poetry. I wonder if Reznikoff doesn't like Corman's . . . .

---

dated by LN: Nov. 6
dated by LZ: /61
tls.

Hi:

Yes, the friend of David[1] was here–about one o'clock Saturday just after I'd eaten. I asked him if he had and he said as a matter of fact he hadn't so lo I had just cooked a chicken (some of it had to be saved for Harold for the next day), stewed and put on bread. I would have made biscuits but I told him I couldn't talk and make them at the same time and couldn't cook anyhow. He said he was "hung over" having been up till 4 a.m. Asked for aspirin. So with coke, cottage cheese and cookies he had to make a meal.

He talks so well. Didn't smile too much–we smiled over August Derleth's number of books (by himself)–his 94th has just come out. J. says D. knows he isn't high ranking, it doesn't bother him. We spoke of D. H. Lawrence–I'm reading the Diana Trilling collection of his letters. I was copying some from it for you when he came, will send when I've finished. Lawrence was interested in so much more than

sex! Has some of your moral force. I felt sorry for Bertrand Russell at L's hands but I know what L. meant.

Jonathan said I should send him a ms to print when I get one together again! Suzz

We spoke of Louis Zukofsky, of course, with the utmost pleasure and respect! Did your ears burn? He wants to bring out a book of short poems by you–suzz.

He left his Amen/Huzza/Selah–gave it to me–and I enjoy it immensely. There is an energy of youth, Louie, there is, because it's here and I'm reminded of a like energy in "55" and Anew. I like what happens later in life, tho, too.

Oh and your preface–nice, in form of letter. With that lovely, lovely bit from Barely and Widely. Your diving into languages, your excavation of words, I leave to you and J. I feel that J. is not at all shallow . . . .

Well, otherwise it's cold old November. Heard Nehru on radio on Meet the Press. The leader of the Neutrals! I've always thought the world of him.

Love to you all
Lorine

Note

[1] Jonathan Williams, poet and editor of the Jargon Society.

---

dated by LN: Dec. 31 '61
tls.

Dear Louie:

Yes, well, happy new year to you, Celia and Paul.

Such wonderful Christmas presents, It Was and Kulchur. Nice to read over Ferdinand and find it so good. It has a stature! Good of Cid to review Anew which came out also so long ago. You are indeed timeless in your Time. And that Thanks to the Dictionary! The first time I saw it I had just come back from the New York Public Library where I'd read D.H. Lawrence's Fantasia of the Unconscious. And I saw Dali. You know, I shun travel but it's bound to give one something, maybe much more than if one stayed home in a chair and got it in magazines or books. Just because the body went along?

When I see how much Lawrence got out of the Etruscan wall paintings and how much I see from his accounts of them–but I'd get sick from the dampness and die quicker than he did. Apropos of what I said above, the mind probably can't remember all by itself but I hope I remember something from all this absorption I'm undergoing with D.H.

As to when your book comes from Scotland I canna tell you. Be patient, as John Adams wrote to Abigail when she was in a hurry for him to get the Declaration of Independence set up and signed (and to include in it the Ladies) but this lady will timidly ask . . . .

---

dated by LN: Thurs
dated by LZ: 1962
postmarked: Feb 8. 1962.
apcs.

Dear Louis:
Had a chance to spend an hour in the library last night and what do I see in Nation (Feb 3, I think) Daruma by Louis Zukofsky! I copied it. I felt lucky I was there to refer to big dictionary and encyclopedia but neither gave Daruma so awright, *give* —
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Sun. Feb. 18
dated by LZ: /62
tls.

. . . Oh yes, Daruma–I don't know–I must read again.

You know someday, 500 years from now, a poet's language is going to be very scientific, that is, words will be explored to the limit of their roots and their connotations etc. and it will be a separate language from anything the man in the street knows. They'll still have to turn back once in a while, tho, to Mother Goose or Mark van Doren ? or me ?) and to LZ where the study (the Trouble!) of the word began, the value of the poet's language began, not so?

March can't be far away
Lorine

---

dated by LN: March 26
dated by LZ: /62
als.

. . . Thousands of geese make a wilderness in your ears here. Water all over the back land, sunset paints all this calm water with ducks swimming in it. It's all so nice when the anxiety of a high flood is past–we think, now that the ice is out of the river and the rise has been slow, there won't be nearly as much water as we expected. Hardly expect it on my floor this spring.

Madison Saturday–brought home Emily Dickenson in paperback and some Thoreau and The Origins of Scientific Thought by Giorgio de Santillana. One chapter is "The Power of Number", another, "Man the Difficult Measure". Suzz . . . .

I'm so tired–try not let present and future problems submerge youz –(*I* shd. talk)–

Lorine

---

dated by LN: April 3 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Zs:

Them cool Cats![1] Even with my poor latin I see you follow pretty closely tho, not literally. You are as immersed in this as I am in flood. Water on running board of pick-up truck as we ride to work. Pussy Willows big, their tops above water. Whistling swans here but also as yet ice on both lakes.

Get up at 5:00, leave home at 6:15, home at 5:00–O but poems floating in. You'll soon have a bit of vacation–

L.

Organs are being thrown out of tune by jet sound blasts.

Use of *ready* in 42?

Notes

[1] Celia and Louis' translations of Catullus: *Catullus (Gai Valeri Catulli Veronensis Liber)* (London: Cape Goliard, 1969).

---

dated by LN: Wed.
dated by LZ: Apr 18/62
als.

Dear Louie:

Frog trills, barred owl's scary noise, splashes in the water which is still in my backyard–moonlight, O lovely night. I don't think Venice could be better! Venice has its odors, I'm told, its garbage–so do we–this has been the filthiest little flood for garbage and tin cans.

POTH enclosed. *Please return.*

They say your book is nearly ready.

Reason I'm *tuned* to this night–been out picking up large pieces of wood, pulling 'em to side of road where maybe country truck will pick 'em up.

Harold coming for Apr 29th instead of for Easter–goes to his daughter and granddaughter then. (Easter)

Sure–*you* take care of pictures after book is out.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: May 28
dated by LZ: /62
als.

. . . Poem in frog-ness about Blackhawk Island.[1] I read too much so-so poetry or too much *perfectly made* poetry, find myself doing it too and coming out staid and dull. Unless I keep up with LZ or remember Gerard Manley Hopkins I could easily write myself into oblivion.

N.D. 17 terribly interesting but kind of hectic. Origin is so satisfying most of the time, nicht wahr? So good that you send me ND and others on my birthdays, Xmas etc. . . .

Enjoying Santayana's "The Poet's Testament"–especially his funny plays about Plato.

Keeps thundering but never rains. I have several plants of the flower Loosestrife–does well in my black soil . . . .

Well, so–when my feet get thru thundering I'll return to Santayana's gentle rain and Blackhawk frogs–sometimes, you know, if you can't make exciting lines, you can make a poem as a whole, a tone that is full and holds all thru.

Lorine

Notes

1

Get a load
of April's
fabulous

frog rattle–
lowland freight cars
in the night

[*My Life By Water*, p. 81]

She wrote another frog poem later:

Frog noise
suddenly stops

Listen!
They turned off
their lights

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

and also incorporated it into "Thomas Jefferson Inside":

Winter when no flower

The Congress away from home

Love is the great good use
one person makes of another
(Daughter Polly of the strawberry
letter)

Frogs sing – then of a sudden
all their lights go out

The Country moves towards violets
and aconites

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

dated by LN: Sept 26 '62
als.

Dear Louie:

I work so hard these days–I can hardly sit down long enough to enjoy those two reviews of MFT in Kulchur 7.[1] Tonight I read them for the third time and I still laugh and blush a bit–but with some pride, of course! J's–"comparing Lawrence's letters with Keats'"!–I have no memory of any inclination even, to do this. And you, my mentor and champion, he says–true, but I was very careful this shdn't come from *me* so's not to embarrass you–maybe it might, I don't know. It still seems too good to be mentioned in the same breath with Bill Williams and you–and Emily Dickinson! J. being young (is that why?) and unused to elderly (?) criticism the review has such a flattering sound. And LN personally–when what we're talking about is *poetry*! Well, he's very good to do this for me. Nice if he'd put 16 Once Published along with mine. Sorrentino has always been an admirer of me pomes . . . .

Ian writes, asks me what more do I want? And says I shd. now get some posh publisher to do a Collected. *Goodness*, how, where, do I even start? . . .

Saw a review of Robert Kelly's first book quoting him–there's a name, I think to watch. I think it's odd no one speaks of Cid's poetry –but maybe at 59 he too will be praised!

O I wonder what you'll think of the Midwest 5 poem. Wunner, wunner. In a way it's a mongrel–has both sentence–melodic line, and fragment of sentence. But something got achieved there–ecstasy, why go any further.

I am sowing tons of grass seed on the torn-up and raked lawn. Next, sawing willows to prevent 'em from towering above my house (Harold returned my saw, Sat) and bedding down my perennial plants.

How are you feeling? School starts now earlier, themes, *could* there be another school that wd. give you a better deal?

Yes, I know–yr letter explaining you write so intensely to get away from unbearable world etc.

Lorine

I wdn't know how to write poetry without Zukofsky and J. wdn't know how to review poetry without Zukofsky!

Notes

[1] *My Friend Tree* was published in 1961 in Scotland by Ian Hamilton Finlay's Wild Hawthorn Press. The reviews she refers to are: Jonathan Williams, "Think What's Got Away in My Life", *Kulchur*, 2, no. 7 (Autumn, 1962); Gilbert Sorrentino, "Review of *My Friend Tree*", *Kulchur*, 2, no. 7 (Autumn, 1962).

---

dated by LN: Oct 7 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

Just heard Marianne Moore on radio FM on Poetry, soul of the people. Voice quavered, a nice nervous half-chuckle occasionally–she'd say "I thought I would read Propriety." (Silence, chuckle) "Well, I don't think I will." She spoke not from notes but spontaneously halting. Said her doctor's husband, meeting her in the elevator, asked "Where is this crow of yours?" She, "Well, it's in my imagination." Altogether, her comments made her sound more of the people than I am!

Rezy sent me his book. I asked if he had an extra copy to send maybe to Ian.

Hope you feel better now.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: Nov 18 [1962]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

Tell me what Oct-Nov Poetry costs–I want to send 'em the correct amt.

Mont. Ward man came and fixed pump–he cdn't have done better if he'd been the "greatest plumber in all London" as Hunt's neighbors called the one that lived near 'em. A model now of silent perfection, that pump, between drawings of water. Greatest plumber poem[1] finished, also one on pump.

Terrifying week end with lawyers over the brown cottage. If business were business and not intrigue!

L.

1

Notes

The Greatest Plumber
in all the town
from Montgomery Ward

rode a Cadillac carriage
by marriage
and visited my pump

A sensitive pump, sd he–
It has at times
a proper balance

of water
air and
poetry

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

---

dated by LN: Dec. 24
dated by LZ: /62
tls.

Hi:

. . . Your Al poem in Poetry,[1] yes –I wonder if we dare to close the gap someday–What we feel, see, inside us and outside us melted together absolutely. There's this new sense in poetry–even I with lines into each other as "Along the river"–your contrapuntals–the young today don't do it but they must be absorbing it unconsciously. Wonder if Robert Kelly will.

The music in Kulchur 8–I tried on McA's piano–as well as I could with magnifying glass in one hand and sometimes looking for a third hand to hold the magazine and I'd say those notes seem to fit the words. Looks important and fine and tell the young composer I salute him, so far as I am able to comprehend.

Cid's Sun Rock Man–was he reading you back when this was first printed–'56? I hope he doesn't write too many poems, just a few perfect ones in that absolutely quiet way . . . .

Notes

[1] "Atque in Perpetuum A. W.", *Poetry*, 101, nos. 1 & 2 (Oct. - Nov., 1962). Al is Celia's brother.

---

dated by LN: March 10 [1963]
apcs.

Dear Louie:

. . . Reading Flaubert's Letters. What divine things he said about *Art*.

But yes, I meant to say, first of all, Williams dead and I thought you'd be there, yes, in no matter what weather. He has quite a bit to show for his life, he really does.

Geese and red-wings here.

Lorine

---

dated by LN: Friday
dated by LZ: 2/7/64
als.

. . . I have 13 poems *saved* for Cid for I guess no. 17. I figure it will be a year or so before I have to send the bundle. There is sumpn in moving to a new place and now when I go back home this summer maybe it will seem new to me. I'm trembling on the verge of something, a form of poetic thinking that depends maybe too much on readers' imagination, but we'll see. I don't know if it's called metaphysical or not, not necessarily, I guess, but anyhow this has been in me from the beginning and somehow it's got to come out.

Wish we cd. all go together to see the play "The Man of All Seasons".

Love to you all three
Lorine

---

dated by LN: Apr. 3 [1964]
tls.

Dear Louie:

Your mention of Origin ending very likely with no. 14 or so stunned me but actually it would be all the best for me, I think. Quantity isn't my forte–I can think of one good poem among the lot I'd send Origin, the others are no better than hundreds being written now. I sent Cid a letter regular mail so haven't had time to hear from him.

My life has this rhythm now of going out home week ends and coming back to Milwaukee Mondays. The worst bother is getting the food ready, some of it cooked or roasted, before leaving on Saturday altho once I get out there I enjoy just warming up the things . . . .

Reading Ruskin[1]–his letters home from Venice to his Pa. After he'd been not long married to Effie Gray who was so unlike him, wonder if she really was. He was a Turner enthusiast, rather; Turner's pictures became his life. He wanted to live in the country quietly with an occasional trip to the Alps (Effie, he said, would not like the country, but he couldn't help it), and anyhow, he said, "I shall be living altogether in Turner". When he saw Tintoret, however, he felt that nothing in the world gave him "so great an idea of human power . . . No writing, neither Homer's nor Dante's–nor Shakespeare's, seems to me indicative of so colossal an intellect. Their work is only thought–Tintoret's is actual Creation . . ."

About his book The Stones of Venice–"You know I promised them no Romance–I promised them Stones. Not even bread." Shades of LZ: "Every hour of talking to people is like so much shortening of my life".

He quotes some wonderful things – Exodus: "And there was in that place also a gust of that old Egyptian East wind: which brought the Locusts upon Pharaoh." And Milton (old style but the man felt some things): "the glorious temple reared Her pile" (Milton might have capitalized Temple) and "To warm him wet returned from field at eve . . ." But even then, 1851, he says it was painful to travel in Italy, everything was being destroyed. One wonders what is left there now. But you were there and must have seen sumpn.

March was a horrible month here and it's still cold and snowy–hope PZ hasn't got the sniffles from it. Do you still eat watercress like you used to? I never see it in the stores here.

This is an eatin' letter! (such problems I face as rutabagas–plural? pork shanks, cabbage–ugh!)

Love to you
all
from Lorine

Know what's happened to Clark Coolidge's magazine? Hasn't arrived, I mean.

Notes

1

Ruskin found wild strawberries
and they were a consolation
poor man whose diaries
were grey with instances of rose

I think tonight we'll have the liver
since tomorrow we go out
tho not of course like him
to Metaphysical dinner
following Greco

[*Blue Chicory*, n.p.]

---

dated by LN: July 23
dated by LZ: /64
als.

Dear Louie:

Norton–o how verrry wonderful. Respectable at last! *All*! Only it won't be *All*. We use *All* soap detergent when we go to the laundromat when we don't have *Family Flakes*!! *All* is a nice title–yes . . . .

Cid wrote. He lives in a house now different from former address but still in Kyoto. "I happen to think poetry MATTERS."–etc etc. Good old Cid.

My God, it's hot here. What do you do about that in N.Y.? Fan? I remember I used to keep the house cool by closing the doors, pulling the shades and reading Proust! Or Edmund Wilson on the Symbolists . . . .

---

dated by LN: Dec. 1
dated by LZ: /64
tls.

. . . I ought to be shot for parting with that Feb. '31 Poetry. And I remember the evening you reached up on your shelves and handed it to me to keep. But I copied a great deal from it before mailing off. Reznikoff has never been given such knowing treatment anywhere–before or since–I'm sure, almost in fact the *only* recognition.

Love to both
Lorine

---

dated by LZ: 5/18/68
apcs.

Dear Louie and Celia:

A firebomb was thrown into South Hall on the campus early this morning, Saturday!

O those lilacs[1] –

Lorine

Hope you aren't too knocked out. *Bleeding Heart* is *Dicentra Spectabilia*, Celia.

Notes

[1] On May 17, 1968 Niedecker met Celia and Louis Zukofsky in Madison. She writes to Corman on May 21, 1968: "Best thing that could have happened from my point of view to all of us (Celia very much interested, darting to the base of the shrubs to read the latin on the sticks, LZ baring his grey head to the sun and I revelling in the color) – [Lawrence] Dembo took us to the arboretum to see all those lilacs in bloom and several other trees and bushes."

---

dated by LN: Nov. 23, 1970
tpcs.

Dear Louie:

Disturbing you too often but this is my last for a while. LIV[1] says my 29 pp not enough, shd. be 64 pp in the interest of economy ! but "beautiful writing" etc . . .

O sure. And J.W. arrives at his place in Conn., tells him he wants to do another book for me (my God after a 5-year wait for T & G–I don't have that many years left. Cid wants to get out a book for me. I may let him, don't know, better perhaps wait another 2 or 3 years and give LIV 64 pp.

Close to zero here!

I really kind of liked the Richard Chamberlain Hamlet on TV.

Al's daughter Julie in Australia prepares for a hot Christmas–so far they've been carrying a stove from room to room like Cid does in Japan. Hope you carry yourselves with strength–

Lorine

Notes

[1] James Laughlin, editor of New Directions Publishing House.

Milo De Angeli

Five Poems and Two Essays

(Translated from the Italian by Lawrence Venuti)

WITH BROKEN OARS THEY EMBARK

Statues, serenity of the sleigh
toward the mountains: how vulnerable
to a certain love to be
lost on the landing without a banister!
Garden of the pit and the lightning bolt
where the diver suspended in air
is feverish . . .
and you, chalk-colored,
don't remove the winter
that descends in his voice: he is alive
like a nocturnal parchment, he breathes like a son.
Sky and earth
are calm, kneeling.

STONES IN THE WARM MUD

Laugh once, when the evening
wind carries a wonder
that can't be seen, but resumes
in the outline of the shadows and profanes the pact
and sees the wild apple tree, the poplar
birds whose meaning and necessity
to be born again are unknown
yet in the air they hollowed out the right
direction, the current
that was liberating, in the ocean, the same one
that now conquers the moment
oaks and poplars
of the woman warrior who is sleeping

in the warmth of an esteem
denser toward the end: already the trapped fly
frees itself in flight
melody of the water and the conch
which a gesture will change into experience,
within a complete action, suddenly
after escaping among the branches
here's the dusty road, the field
the salvation
that swims toward a luminous calm
shelter for the hares
tired of traps, after millennia,
and the storm, the clearing sky
everything is so alone
it can become anything.

TELEGRAM

The window remained as before. The cold
repeats that idiotic essence of rock
while the letters of every word tremble. I seek only
an exit, some elevator,
and even when I tell you of the sea
the sea is a few square meters, a drill,
scarcely out. And it's the intuition
of a daughter who breathes only
in the first moments of a thing. Paper to say
rice and bread, month to say cushion. The blue ones call me,
frozen in a fixed star.

BORN ON THE EARTH

Born on the earth
that remains

hardly were we that breathless rejoicing
when the minds arrived
on the back of a canary
and conquered. A
matron-at-arms
is screwed to our flank, guardian
of the tables, a harpoon
in the Mediterranean world, among the eggs.

You didn't want to share
the plunder and so
you have me forever
because there was nothing else
but the pure victory. Later
we shall throw our prey
to the cats: they will know
how to destroy it!

Here is the quartz page
in the agenda, when
every man is razed to the ground
and remembers. The pine cones fill
this courtyard
faithful to its meters: the very tree
of the door
that is perennial for anyone who notices it
and yet is air, only air. It has a severity
and a still attentive custodian. These
were the numbers.

THE KILLING

Someone hesitated before the light-switch,
but then he struck all the same because of a buzzing
one day in the kitchen
again and always an elegy of herds
which the poison nonetheless distinguishes.

This, with a style of quiet, was the hatred
and the thousand atoms in the artery that awaited
the killing neither rapid nor doubtful nor anything,
but the pure killing without footprints:
in a spring whiteness the body stirred.

Thus goes the story and you have the suspicion
of another time: millennia
encrusted in the resin, people
who fill the skin, the garbage can, the nightmare
of the hands, when sleep
abandons them near the ditch.

STARTING OVER:
An Autobiographical Note

Having immersed myself only recently (1977-1980) in the iron arguments for starting over in poetry, I shall attempt a rapid history of this immersion. Perhaps the first memory–in elementary school–is that famous one of the "laughing, fugitive" eyes of Silvia in Leopardi. This was a subject on which a critic of that era dwelt, maintaining how senseless it was to reverse the two adjectives ("fugitive, laughing") because of the presumed risk of losing the feminine transience of a glance that "requires a slippage into that fugitive closure." Like other classmates, I immediately sensed the banality of such an explanation, and with them I began to imagine the beauty, the different beauty, of "fugitive, laughing."

Years later, while reading the hermetic poets, I saw that there was a subtle attention paid to breaks and combinations in many verses of Mario Luzi (above all from *Honor of the Truth*) or of the best Alfonso Gatto or of Pietro Bigongiari. (More than in others, where often the interruption seemed contrived, accompanied by a solemnity that leaves open mouths and hews to the rhetorical tradition bound closely to cogency.) In fact, I recall two lines from Bigongiari underlined in an old anthology–"Death is this/glance fixed on your courtyards"–two lines in which the caesura seemed and still seems to me inevitable: death is "this" and at the same time–after a silent interval–the "glance on your courtyards," with that

strange link between glance and fixity, two terms that don't agree, apparently, but which are wed in the totality of the poetry. Then, after years in secondary school and the university, I sought something else: a starting over even farther removed from meaning–from the meaning inherent in two separated lines and from that orchestral meaning that illuminates their separation–I sought, in other words, a rupture of the sentence that might be constrained by, but not derivable from, the sentence itself or the totality of the sentences. A rupture that might derive from a kind of dictation, which commanded both that the sentence be broken without explanation and that this break be loved in a total vision of poetry, although not of that poetry: "total" being understood here as the whole of what pre-exists–a poetic–and of what is impending, a groping that *will become poetic*.* By the same token, the term "dictation" does not in the least exclude infinite corrections or variants, scrupulously committed to the faithful repetition of what has been dictated. The variant is thus not a disobedience–never this, experimentalism finds it difficult–but on the contrary a more intense hearkening to the command, an "unexceptionable listening."

*A Siberian legend narrates: In a small village in the Byrranga mountains there was woman who was the ugliest of all the women in the village. For years she remained shut in her house, trying to appear in public as little as possible: but everyone was aware of her ugliness and could not stop themselves from avoiding her or simply–as with the most wicked villagers–from deriding her pitilessly. The woman suffered enormously and, one day, decided to turn to the wizard of the village so that he might do something for her. He asked her to give him a few days, saying that a mysterious concoction of herbs could perform the miracle. The woman returned to the wizard, who, full of joy, announced that the concoction was ready and that, if she drank it, she would appear the most beautiful of all the men and women in the village, no one excluded, not even the malicious ones. The woman agreed. She drank the potion–a mixture of herbs which she had never tasted before–and as she was leaving the wizard's house, she realized that the prophecy had been fulfilled: everyone looked at her as if she were a queen. For several days the happy woman walked proudly through the entire village, much to the admiration of anyone who met her. But gradually, as the weeks passed, a worm began to gnaw at her mind. She thought: "Yes, it's true, everyone finds me beautiful, *but in reality I am not:* how shall I endure this secret all my life?" With the passage of time, the gnawing grew more and more bitter, and the woman decided to return to the wizard to tell him how much she was suffering this fracture between the others' gaze and her inner certainty that she was not beautiful. But the wizard–like all the inhabitants of the village–found her wonderful and could only express his admiration to her over and over: "you are beautiful, you are the most beautiful of all."

At this point the legend ends, left unresolved. Hence the woman suddenly finds herself alone and in an instant can decide her life: to allow herself to be invented by the others' gaze, to yield to this gaze, to accept the beauty that is presented to her

THE ABSENTEES

Every manual of Italian literary history records a long void that runs more or less from the fifth century to the *Ritmo Laurenziano** and then to the thirteenth century: entire centuries were spent creating churches, paintings and treatises and forgetting to leave us any poetry. The pages that describe these centuries are gray and lazy with the usual historico-economic interpretations probing in various ways and with diverse subtlety the difficulties of a poetic birth. But then, several pages later, there is suddenly enthusiasm: St. Francis, Jacopone, Guittone, all the others appear. The absent now seem cast aside.

So it happens–prodigiously–that even a manual for schools can teach something, as soon as it refuses to beat its breast for those who could not, or represses any longing for a "history written by the victims," as the saying goes, leaving doubts as to whether the victims are absent ones or those who collect alms so that no one will be absent.

Yet, if someone shouts his love to you, how can you sew up his lips by listing all those who have not shouted it to you? Is there any greater cowardice? Think of Ariadne, when her thread leads Theseus to the mouth of the grotto, Theseus relates to her all his years in the labyrinth, the years when he could not embrace her. But outside, meanwhile, shines the Aegean, calling them unrelentingly. Theseus temporizes, lingers over the joy he missed for so long, and winds up asking Ariadne to share in the darkness of his amputated years. And the Aegean continues to call, with its dense blue, so different from every other sea. It is here, then, that Ariadne, filled with love and disdain, cuts the thread and kills.

until she merges with it and is beautiful by choice; or to preserve her sorrow, her terrible distinction between the others' gaze and her own. The woman chooses. This is what starting over means, among other things. A history unfolding inexorably, on the one hand. And on the other, a sudden split, chained to that history and at the same time unaware that it is unfolding there.

*The *Ritmo Laurenziano* (literally the "Laurentian Rhythm") is the oldest surviving poetic composition in the Italian vernacular. Written between 1151 and 1157 in rhymed, octosyllabic verse, it is the work of a troubadour who requests the gift of a horse from a bishop [translator's note].

SEAN KILLIAN

Four Poems

NEXUS

Now nothing is
but care rising
care will rise but
through bamboo blinds
air alights, because
it thins and thins again
till nothing is but light
beside light, dark stripe
lashed in between.

To have death in
the wind – thoughts
will spin when air surrounds –
the air
blinds –
a still and central
monument – death has us
in the wind.

Let care rise and supplication
tumble up to try
dawn's hush –
air thinned to light beside light,
slat of shadows lashed to every ray.

AS SIGNATURES SAG
(Invocation to Kali)

Endless clues keep
space intact, all its

weathervane violences
sub rosa, secret

until the transparency of doom
lets augurs look
their hearts' desire.
Then space is unwebbed,

blown like ripple and blur,
nothing left but a few
voices and perhaps an
electric eel migrating through an ideogram.

Throw the sticks and
the cat's black path
must be the fiction we soon create.
I follow, however late, your blinking

and the hatted savants take
off their pearl robes to bathe in
your base, amorous sweat. The deaf and dumb
are put in fire's lucidity –

we'll see the lump sum come
awkwardly onto the sundial, swimming
through our eyelashes. No one gets beyond
the "privacy" of unclouded windows –

I wait for what chance will choose.
I crawl up a torchsong, take off
like a butterfly, divining your
inklings which rustle leafy and

the sand of names blows into dunes
settling on a sunstruck afternoon.
The witch will chuckle, hoarse moon
more blatant than a screamer, worse

than a bluestreak talker, a loose mouth
to be sure but a whisper, a rhetorician
of whispers worse! Augurs stoop to
tangled images drying on her bed.

Subliminal whinnies wait in the back
of a cave. Phosphor keeps belief, what's

left of it in the tail of a firefly, in
the soft cool shock of algae breaking ashore.

No one knows the devices by which
we attain luminescence though some
buy clockfaces, expecting love
on schedule; when what is ravels

so suddenly there's no time but
to glimpse the hands swinging freely
through the wilderness of momentous space.
I stab at the burning fetish, but

your revelling voodoo has dropped
its thumbtacks for a subtler bruise –
your mouth on mine. I want out but
I can't back out on knees. Since when?

Since you cut me dead. Since you
levelled my manhood with one flip
of your forefinger and thumb – victory
comes easy, the wattage of sperm

ready to run its current. Slippage
of no sparing! Chance will take its
seasoned apparitions and go. I'll gag
on a mouthful of red peppers while you sign

my name to the dotty line of a "there's more" . . .

TRIGGER FINGER
(On Translation)

A different tongue
runs over your beautiful body,
translating it.
Civilizations rise

from the more wonderful
ruins of savages.
There's no way to speak
truly. The translation says
it swears to be kiss, not corpse.
But the civil banks on
the criminal in a wary
weaving. The origins gag
on their own foreignness.
The lips sizzle, warp.
We live to know
these nights of dallying,
the gaga way of the grateful.
We are crisp with
this unison, the body
a hunch and mating traducing time.
The beloved, the original
has long dropped inside a darkness –
there to be ferreted – there to be found –
made not indifferent. But
she has translated past dried ink,
unremoveable stain, stasis. Her
paralysis has been fingered enough.
She has no inklings of the perfect, fading lover.
He can only translate her. Or someone else
will try it. The truest lust touches down
and the only imagined beloved lifts her ghost
in the drawn sentences, in the fresh phrases.
We strip the static and another version
is held on our lips, on our tongues.
The foreign beauty accepts the guesses of my thumb.

MISSIVE

My mirror has
no acorns for my snowed-in face
My hands will try to interfere
I lift each finger to conduct

I'll find a silent lying
but will my mouth manipulate
a gleaning, a lying low?
How can craft
touch down on unowned light?

Trusted to sunlight
shows a running off
the slow melt that is memory
Why lie silent when I muse?
My eyes have wintered
this mirror and now
the snowflakes are snailpace
Surfeit sweeps down
Storm has caught the sky

Any set of hands is welcome
to interfere but these hands
will freeze
Interference is a lovely
spring wind but that has
to wait – I always elect to fondle
some remote imagining
Acorns may be broken
for their meat

CLARK COOLIDGE

Listener's Reach

Notes On Some Continual Sources
for David Meltzer

Okay, right, back into it, the endless musics, a necessity. Back, which in the listening, comes forward. The recordings, which were all that's left of most improvised music at any one point. The search, the shelves loaded with silent sounds, but ultimately what all this does to the mind, no? I wonder. Just precisely who are we, what spirit, following years of edging our heads into sonic crevices, listening through the overheads of static and hiss. Sometimes I feel like *I* am Dean Benedetti! Leastwise, we learned to use our brains like picks, calipers, and not just float on the sog of easy album. And Russ Freeman, right, it's necessary to know what happened! Not just that he went to Vegas and led lounge bands for years, but how could he come loose from those angular forms he made and that made him a shape we listened for. That Art Pepper Among Friends album reveals, for one thing, that McCoy Tyner modal blahblah happened to him too. Tyner has got to be (though I do love his early work with Trane, trios, etc.) one of the worst pervasive influences on pianists going. He became an easiness you could drop into, the slackest way all chords relate. Of course this gets into that whole (still unresolved) issue of changes versus scales: to me it's a bit like when sculptors put down and forget about their hammers and begin molding wet clay. Chords have *angles*, and they set up sharp vectors in the space that modes gloss over. When Miles Davis proposed Kind of Blue, he challenged players toward a genius of *melodic* invention that proved almost beyond human ken (mostly, Miles himself couldn't make it). Coltrane, in the midst of all those often glorious sheets, sometimes would find a phrase that was like a crevice in the chromatic universe pointing the way back through into a changes-orientation, an inside-out feeling that gave great emotional charge. And Cecil Taylor, in the late Fifties, used to talk about making a tune that would feature "the ultimate changes." All that keeps returning to me, beautifully unresolved. Also recalling Cecil (in A.B. Spellman's book) talking about an early Sixties concert with Lyons and Cyrille: "and there were points in which we would get into, like a pure idealistic thing." A hint there of maybe the best use of that well-worn "ideal" word, almost a verb, almost like Rilke, say. Close to somebody talking about the real reason why we do these things?

And how to talk about everything important at once and get it generating further, not just an enumeration or exercise in catalog. I sometimes wish I could feed my record shelves into a random mixmaster, which would feed me out tracks unchosen/unawares. Why doesn't all this technology *really* do us some good? But lacking that, there are the ones we return to, again and forever it seems and with good hope. It would be right to make such a list right now, to keep up presences of memory and as antidote to the old "What do you think of the latest . . .?" syndrome. Sometimes I wish, as I hurry from bin to machine sweating for the current inroads, it would just all STOP. At least for a single night here in the midst of the mess. (Image of Jean Shepherd's stringband-powered lemmings streaming over the final edge: "Yes! Let's go!") So, a pantheon of my returning ones, humming goads of the unfinishable project.

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Monk. After thirty years of listening, and playing on his tunes, I have no doubt he's written the most generative body of compositions in jazz. Endless avenues in each tiny hamlet. This kernel will always grow. And ultimately one must have all his albums, but the special ones for me are the solo outings (the Columbia, the Riversides, the Vogue). Portraits of the Monk Silences, you can almost "see" his mind inching, how those shapes come to *be*. The ways he made that black box *ring*. Condensation through Silence producing Endlessness.

Listening to Off Minor, I recall a scene in the dim-off past sitting around one whole night with some cats bashing our head against the bridge of that tune. There's a very odd chord alternation in there that we never could get to sound right. A most resistant alchemy. And I've heard versions of that tune since where the musicians just faked their way over that change, couldn't hear it, or anyhow couldn't make it, gave up (Monk keeping his secrets?). The Sphere is wound so tight that if you can't hear the chords you can't play the melodies, and (as Steve Lacy said) if you can't play the melodies you can't blow on the tunes! An additional mystery: how Monk makes the standards he plays on sound like he wrote them. That Webernian I Should Care, especially the ending, for instance. I once played that track next to Webern's Piano Variations and they went together like mates. Wonder if Monk even ever heard Webern? Maybe not. But then, nobody invented the atom. Also

mysterious: how Monk's pieces are such sophisticated structures and same time remain prima materia, like great beautiful clinkers lit by an undiscovered sun.

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I picked up the double reissue of Brubeck Trios and recalled how I needled every crevice of those Fantasy 10-inchers till you could almost see light through them. Some of his heads on those tunes, when not too consciously "classicals," still shine. Tea For Two is one. I just got a flash of the wallpaper pattern in that attic room of my folks' house where I first listened to those sides, snapping brushes across my first snare drum (a Slingerland black & gold-flash model). No wonder I never learned to dance! Or prove geometry propositions. Ancient frigates sailing toward purple clumps of weed . . .

All the old Brubeck quartets, up until Morello joined, are well worth the rehearing. Especially the live recordings. Jazz Goes To College is an album I've never tired of. Even its acoustics (via early amateur tape) have a presence (before Columbia fucked it up with phony starey-o) that sounds to me like the sound of meditation itself, maybe because I think it was this precise album that I learned to listen *into* music on. I even love to ponder the most whacky pondering mad-grit Brubeckian key-gnashings, where it sounds like he's trying to carve out harmonies with axe-point from *inside* (if only he had had a rhythmic sense equal to his harmony-head). I don't think I know a more intense all-out *improvisation* than his Balcony Rock solo. I mean, you can talk about swing, fingerpopping et al, but that slow build up through some of the maddest corner-turnings of idea, his way of using riff structures to layer strange heavy chordal bunches that even got to Cecil Taylor at that time. And Desmond I've come to appreciate (hardly the word) even more since my early fascination with the group. I see him as an unequalled *melodic* improviser. His solo on Little Girl Blue (Jazz: Red Hot & Cool) still kills me. And his Carnegie Hall variations on For All We Know, a gorgeous tune with that altered change at the end. Outside the Bru Band a favorite Desmond is the Warners First Place Again album, pure melody out of air on the perfect touch of Percy Heath and Jim Hall. But so many . . . Even the later albums, where he's fighting Morello for a lot of the time, have perfect Desmond melodics. And the sadness of that last tour when he had almost no breath left, could only play short phrases. On the concert broadcast by Public Television he played a whole solo on A Train *totally* composed of tiny quotes from other tunes.

Joe Dodge's bass drum. A sound to reckon with, still. Best recorded example: that opening shot on A Train (Jazz Goes To College). I once asked him how he could possibly get that sound, like a door slammed at the end of a long hallway. He just pointed to the batter head, the calfskin totally hidden beneath masses of moleskin bandages and adhesive tape repairs.

There's still a lot of retrievable mystery in those long solos, "my own catastrophes" Brubeck once called them. Massed harmonic wisdoms, sometimes he seems almost to forget rhythm entirely, so bound down does he get in the chordal depths. I can recall Fifties Brubeck concerts where you'd get that "I saw him *in*side" feeling of total committed improvisation. The main reason he was such a hero-model for me as a kid. One *could* take universe in hand and make it over into a run to the end of the night. Literally everything else faded away from those moments of solo which grew huge in time and even space. Later I began to see the frat-boys spilling beer on their Bru discs and gave 'em a sneer. What could they possibly hear? It's impossible not to feel superior at some point in your early life. Collegian popularity must have been some colossal mistake. The look and manner of those Bru guys, especially when *not* playing, must have made them acceptable enough to Fifties lounge-sitters. But when I watched the Brubecks playing I saw the possibility of madness.

Meditative space of the long Brubeck feel. I remember watching him build up those big structures. Serious digging-in and platforming the space beneath you with wielded notes. Brubeck some kind of chordal carpenter. Desmond the sluice-gate for tensile exhalation. Brubeck with a real hold on narrowing and thickening the line. Tension of sequence as a sentence structure. Improv meant you went at it *hard*, clang down of hands, use your legs too. High-wire walker tipping a lead bar for monstrous balance. And then, suddenly chorus-end amazement of your position, raise brow and blow pianissimo, sing and let the dust settle in the blackbox. The crowd will wait behind the lights. Pin drop to babble roar of Brubeck audiences in a few seconds flat. Risk as a coefficient of high-paying one-niters. I hear Fifties Brubeck always in a closed-in echoing four-square hallspace, pin spot on the black varnish corners, Brubeck arrayed in a huge hunch, his head disappearing below the Baldwin sign, Desmond's clasped hands over a tiny brass glow, his tight smile closed-eye punning on his hands, Joe Dodge chugging his used-car bassdrum blanks with a very hip configuration of angled elbows and ducked head behind

light hornrims. A clangor boxed in quiet. They had their own structure of jazz to climb, no matter the uptown derogatories of hardbop nothing putdowns, the endless replays of their least interesting tune. They belong in no "stream," anomalysville forever. I see them in the Fifties heights, making planes to Oroville, taking pictures of airports, numberless choruses of On The Alamo tending and pending in their brains, signing autographs with regular-guy smiles while within it's all innards of risk and "weird" musics to get up on and speak your piece before TIME covers slam down on everyone and the vista wastes into middle-aged Morellos at every bus station grinning and slapping five.

*

That Harris/Flip/Lennie wire (Tristano jam club recording) is a popper and opener. Those great "lost" wires and early tapes, racked off in some backroom clubmist times-forgotten, bars recaptured, "off-the-record" and surprised from the doldrums, sheerly golden at lengths, full of cashglass tinkle and rhythm-men nameless, are perhaps the Secret History of Jazz? With the lights turned off, some cats seem to have always been solidly *on*. Lost nights in the Village, and someday we'll meet somebody who'll absently say "I was there." I like to think we all were. In this case: brilliantly haltless Lennie Cascades, metallic as in dreams of the Forties, no matter what's playing on top. An unspoken facet: the *energy* of Tristano. And I can hear Shearing listening and ready to puff and soften it all down for the half-ear crowd later. Brubeck heard it too, from his Milhaudian closet far west Mills valley. But what did the Forties Middle-Rangers think of it baffling away back there? Norman Granz snorts back another one and flicks Lennie off his coming JATP list. Oscar Peterson already signed for the "energy" slot in Norman's brain. But, Bill Harris? He hears, and you can hear him, of all on that date, picking up and trying to mesh figures with Lennie here and about. Flip Phillips is off in a dream of honking crowds into sagbutt oblivion. Billy Bauer is a chestnut, a ghost of Lennie in his speed-blends, perhaps why he never rose as star in jazz-crit estimation and scorecard? Denzil Best, actually to brush his best with Shearing soon up, cracking away drunk back there. He always sounds to me like a less scrappy Roy Haynes. And Chubby Jackson proving I guess the Forties power to enter any and all sessions of a Woody Herman credit card. On such nights are we all built, and jazz . . .

*

Cecil Taylor at Newport is a gorgeous early foundry. Which, along with the BlueNote reissue of Jazz Advance, should forever place him on his own foundations for all further listening. Dennis Charles with his iron THWACK sound, like he found a secret hollow in Art Blakey, has a forever ghost throne-spot in CT's music for me. Steve Lacy, finding a home in CT's music without torsion of lots-of-notes, defines all the edges. And I always love to recall CT's gloss on Tune Two as "an extension of the ultimate chord changes," which it is. A standout group that should have been free to wax their whole book. Hear again their Boston Sweet and Lovely.

*

Sonny Rollins. The Worktime album is basic. There Are Such Things is one of Sonny's major novels. And Max Roach, the four-square needle jet throughout. A tack-hard attack, those S & M exchanges on All Right With Me. Fifties Bop: soundssounds recorded in tight rooms, air so dry the dust fell like shot. Sonny's bell swaying off and on mike (another rhythm overlay), he was always "in stereo." Max nails the time so hard you can almost cut with it. What S & M make I see as the root meaning of "business." They hoot and hard-edge their centers of gravity. By the mid-Fifties, Bop: an art so sure there were no limits.

The Rollins platform the broadest yet to land. His tone, alone, has a melodic range all its own. His rhythmics an open field of possibilities. Ways to go. In the late-Fifties to mid-Sixties all he needed was a standard bop rhythm team (sans much variation) and he was away, providing all the sculptured posts and solution pockets by his self. On Now's The Time he focussed down to what seems a lone interval of the melody, varying it up into opening vistas largely through tone expansions, the slit widens into whole melodic views. Blue n' Boogie: the Trane variations, those turning 3 and 4 notes figurations, sax by opening and closing the nose. Now Sonny on rhythm-lead, now on the tonals.

52nd Street Theme: another "Woody Woodpecker Symphony?" Recall that late-bop gadget Jackie McLean used to use, they called "The Peck?" A sort of hard-edged speed exchange, call response and banter back, like an antiphony of clipped/stuttered speakers. Trane seems to have internalized the kinetics of that (Chasin' The Trane). Sonny maybe "invented" it? "The Peck" is West Indian as to source ultimate? See early George Wallington quintets etc. The jazz scope is so much *wider* than usually spoken.

A marvelous ease spread and command of directions in the Sonny On Impulse. His sound there opens any space to more than the room it's in. An LP title: Sonny In Confidence. Three Little Words (the title) as description of those little 3 (and 4) note melodic handles he likes to turn endlessly. The stereo layout on that album perfectly displays Sonny's pendulumic swing (as in "a swing"), back and forth of horn bell as he blows. Sonny Searchlight from a room corner.

Sonny's micro-attention to a melody: space between any two notes is an interval worth the expansion. And you could get even farther out meditating on the time factors of intervallic space: distance between any two notes suggesting a certain tempo and its incipient rhythmic possibilities. Or even vibrato rate as time setter?

On the Our Man In Jazz (Village Gate) session you can hear the Ornette Troops really pushing Sonny to the edge. Cherry and Billy Higgins playing so *bright* you forget how dark and boomy the Gate really is. Cherry with cracked-sounding chops of that era, but with the conception to spare. Ideas! "He really saw the movements." His solo on Doxy to be studied for years. A generative music from many points of view. Like, when Sonny pushes to the edge his humour must accompany (or simply as bridge for melodic continuity?). Wish he'd continued, not fallen off this wire. In a later interview he said there was a time when he promised himself he'd never play a mere single pitch by itself again, had evidently perfected the mode of chord-playing then. You can hear a taste of it here. Clearly lit his pluses over the scads of "free" players to follow: high rhythmic change, adhesive humour, seemingly endless melodic planes.

*

What did go wrong with Free Jazz? It's possible that some of the "blame" may be laid in Trane's wake, the way the followers heard him anyway. Late Trane modallic lengths and squawk/squeak texturals (taken as no more than that) turned into el boro nonvariant settos. Ayler, thus, can be seen as the Last of the Melodics? So many Free Players couldn't see or use the way Trane was working *within* knots of harmony, didn't have his vertical chops or balladic backdrop. They lacked a large Ornette *melodic* sense, and this is perhaps where the Free impulse collapsed, on the rocks of linear ignorance? Polyphonic ensemble improvisation demands the foresight of developing longer lines in time. Also an instant (take a leaf from Trane's book) harmonic grasp of the way simultaneous lines are jibing vertically (especially, as in Ornette, if you're not using

chord beacons in the tune). In the later Pharaoh Sanders jinglebell period you can hear what a limited sense of melodics he had to fall back on, past this tour with Trane. So it's hard to avoid thinking of Ornette's Free Jazz sessions as the standout multivalent masterwork of the period.

*

When I first heard Gil Evans I got the hope that maybe he was going to get around the writing-for-sections problem by an aggregated independence of single voices, but. His ear for harmonic textures led him too into his own form of sectional organ-chording, couching lushnesses, the backings for Miles etc. Ornette's Free Jazz (and the alternate take on Twins) still seems the best answer to that, mostly I suppose because it's less writing than blowing. Interesting there to see how horizontal (or as Martin Williams would have it, "melodic rhythm") thinkers fare better than vertical minds. Like, Ornette and Cherry rather than Hubbard and Dolphy. It's almost as if Ornette divided them that way to point this out? But this horizontal/vertical polarity must be finally too simple a notion of "seeing" it all? Note, though, how Trane's Ascension date seems a mineral compounding of sounds beside Ornette's play of woven beams.

*

The Miles Davis Sextet Jazz At The Plaza (1958 live set) is interesting to dig for contrasts and setups of the time. Lousy recorded sound (Miles shifts to a dead mike on the first chorus of If I Were A Bell, etc.), but, listen into the warp. On the first track (a Straight No Chaser inexplicably retitled Jazz At The Plaza) Miles seems to be using his whole opening solo to point up the rhythm, get the time leaning right. This time-slot interaction with the drums notable throughout his works. Or, as Jerome Cooper recently said, "Miles Davis is the greatest drummer." Then Trane pours in, seems to create a vacuum to fill with his own spaces, clearing out everyone else's notes with winds of his own device. Which reminded me of Leonard Feather commenting that Miles' music sometimes sounded like he needed "five tenors" and Miles answering "I once *had* five tenors!" The feeling of Trane at his strongest and most discrete whirling his notes to push some of them out beyond the pitch range of whatever tune, indicating a musical space he maybe never got to fully inhabit. Except in strange bludgeoning moments in the snarl field of his later work? Anyway, in a recording such as this 1958 one (especially in his solo on If I Were A Bell, which shows a time-confidence equal to

Sonny Rollins on Wheatleigh) you get to hear Trane most particularly on this side of the wall. Before he started headlong into the war against it. In contrast, Cannonball sounds like he's playing a streamlined candy stick, but you gotta admire his veneer? A man trapped in the beauty of a Bird cartoon. Great ease, but trapped nonetheless. Then Bill Evans, pushed terrifically by Cobb and Chambers, with some condensed solos (as if Miles occasionally opened the backdoor to him), more instant and interesting structures than usual for him. You can hear him following Trane's solo on Bell with some parallel webs of his own.

*

2/4 meter, from Dodds to Ornette. An impulse that keeps cropping up, especially when a change is being worked on the music. Mulligan/Baker early Fifties quartets, Miles' mid-Fifties quintet, Ornette 1959-60. 2-beat has a way of opening spaces in the rhythm, especially when set against 4/4 habits. Hear Ornette's Free Jazz for a clear example of how 4/4 doubled against itself in the two rhythm teams gives a 2/4 feel to the overall momentum. Makes me think too of the double-time device in mid-Fifties Bop, Art Blakey et al.

*

Those Clifford Brown/Max Roach Bee Hive club tapes make me realize how much I do love listening through all that lo-fi cymbal heat and low ceiling club presence to feel the mind grab off each note solid and on-leaning. Puts me in the mood of old gigging days, or the hiss of late-nite distant station pluckings. How much of our present search means to recapture that initial instance of perfectly hearing *a* note?

*

Dave McKenna. Maybe my favorite in terms of *joy* at play. He makes me smile, heart warm, do high kicks to any ceiling. I realize how romantic I am. He's a compendium of the jazz route, you can hear it all work together into his playing: Louis, Hines, Lester, Tatum, Bud, Tristano. If JellyRoll had played Bop. His solo albums are all great, where he gets to put that wild lefthand to full use. Best is maybe the one just called McKenna (Chiaroscuro 202) with the perfectly graced Darn That Dream, and How High The Moon that keeps stomping off almost beyond your own exhaustion. The Shiah (By Myself) album has beautiful playing on it too, though

sounds like it was recorded through a long vacuum hose. That whistling A Train, a lesson in stop-time blues (Ouzo For Puzo) and gorgeous ballad Jimmy VanHeusen little-known All My Tomorrows. Tears to my eyes, no joke. I even sat in with him once in a dicey Providence dive before I knew better. Nobody *places* a right-hand phrase better.

*

Looking back at Bill Evans . . . I wore out a copy of the Everybody Digs album on my Webcor Holiday NYC 1958-59, so that's a definite prime of my near-epiphanous early Apple memories: Philly's cymbals mixing with the cobblestone truck rumble past my fourth floor window corner of Horatio and Hudson. Peace Piece, grey skies through venetian blinds, boat hoots from the river two blocks over. He was a master of the dynamics-controlled phrasal arc. And I still prefer him with the strongest drummers (that Peace Piece And Other Pieces reissue with additional Chambers/Philly tracks is a windfall corrective in this regard, as is the Verve 1967 Vanguard session with Philly). Motion never killed me: a clean bright sound but doesn't push enough. And the later guys, Morell and Zigmund, sound weak, almost a kind of "businessman's" open drumming, completely predictable, no firecrackers. Too bad he never recorded a trio date with Elvin Jones. Closest thing is the Getz/Evans Verve session with Elvin firing away in back, a teaser. The lowest point was probably that mid-Sixties trio with Israel and Bunker. But that the group was still so anemic once Gary Peacock joined is a mystery to me. Possibly Evans was in his ultimate Mr. Peepers heroin-funk at that point? Of the later recordings I like that Verve Montreux date with DeJohnette, who injects a nice sifty sort of spinal tonic into Evans. And there's his unaccompanied fantasia on Nardis in Paris 1979, sounds like he wasn't "done" yet.

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The Modal Thing. Black ritual primacies recovered? Plus Trane frantic to build vast Babels of scalar variants, so quickly divided that they seem to overlap and you can almost *see* a vertical structure rising. Miles usually gets all the credit for starting the Modal Farm (Kind Of Blue) but I wonder where he got it from. A "desire for more space" (between the changes) is the cliche wisdom, a kind of lazy postbop filigree? That session seems the only one to remain echoing with crystal bell arcades. There's a meditative purity to it that makes of what followed sound Katzenjammer. No doubt George Russell should be mentioned as possible precursor with his late-Fifties

lecturing on modes. But it's fascinating and sad how Kind of Blue-type moments are like flame flickers through the woods, so evanescent nobody's then sure if or what they saw. New doors that so soon turn into old walls.

*

John Lewis. The Statements and Sketches for Development solo LP. Marvelous distillation of his MJQ years and tunes. The realization that, once all the fugues and Europeanisms are said and done, he just might be the great *blues* pianist of that period. One of the true jazz abstractionists too, what can be suggested in just a few notes. Monk's another one, but that's only one of his facets.

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Scott LaFaro. Seemed to lose force in those fast filigrees at the top of the instrument. So I was amazed, when that Ornette Atlantic date came along, how much stronger and low-registered he sounded, how interesting his walking note choices. Buell Neidlinger used to tell me how he and Charlie Hayden would rib Scotty about how you couldn't hear him at the back of the club. So I guess he really revved up when he got into "their" context (Buell also played quite a bit with Ornette at the Five Spot on those nights Charlie was too strung out to appear). I guess LaFaro (out of Red Mitchell, the story goes) was the start of all those millions of million-fingered bassists, and we've sure seen the abuse of that practice since. I wonder if the bass has a built-in problem/limitation which shows up when too many notes are played in too short a length of time, thus each note not given the room to resound through the wood? It does seem a waste when Niels Pederson races around the fingerboard, blunting that huge tone he shows in walking. I'd have to say that Charlie Hayden is the most fully satisfying bassist for me right now. Feels like I'm getting dangerously close to Fig Territory here, but as a drummer I learned to love the neighborhood of that line that reaches back to Jimmy Blanton and Walter Page. Not that "things" can't be discovered to extend the possibilities of the instrument. Wilbur Ware's cyclings of the time, and interval choices in walking, were always fresh (and a big influence on Charlie Hayden I'm sure). Jimmy Garrison's strummings, and the furtherings of that I've heard Fred Hopkins get to. And I do love the way Red Mitchell phrases those bop-line solos. So, there's guys, and ways, as they say. I just turn off at any sort of BuddyRichifying of the bass. Why not just play Big Noise from Winnetka and get it over with?

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Guitar Jazz. Charlie Christian, Django, and then what? Realizing I've always had a problem with the extremely narrow tonal and dynamic range of most bop guitarists, some kind of middle-range setting, sort of mentholated, almost seeping into that Shearing or even Art VanDamme (!) easy-sleep territory and they'd just sit on it, leave it there, seemingly being more interested in the line and variations than the sound. Surely there's plenty of room for tonal variation, which had to wait until Hendrix and the super-electric revolution for a few jazz ears to wake up?

In the wake of Jimmy Raney appear a staggering string of late-bop guitar clones like Joe Puma, Barry Galbraith, Sal Salvador, etc-etcetc, enough to pass you out in the chair. And all of them white. I guess the black guitar geniuses all made tracks for R&B in those years. Until you get guys like Kenny Burrell (out of the uptown organ trio scene) and Wes Montgomery with his octaves. Then Jim Hall seemed to emerge fairly whole from the Charlie Christian economical swing trad (most of his solos from the 2 Degrees East/3 Degrees West session I find I've unconsciously memorized). Ed Bickert, out of Hall with maybe even more sophisticated harmonic savvy. And there's somebody named Dave Cliff (no further data) on that Horo Konitz album, almost being what Billy Bauer disappointingly never quite was. Bauer's Plectrist album, by the way, I once borrowed the tape and was so bored with I didn't even bother and just gave it back. I once read a story that Bauer was afflicted with an almost castrati-like high-pitched voice, so was always embarrassed amongst the boys in the band, tended to shy out and flee. Might somewhat explain his lack of push in the contrapuntal line department? If so, *there's* a guy who maybe should've gotten into the heroin-inviolability scene (I presume he didn't? Another juicer?) and winged away in his head for all he was worth. Funny how we're always fantasizing ways, techniques after the fact, whereby all these cats could have been better!

*

Those Fifties "experimental" sessions on on Prestige with Hall Overton, Jimmy Raney, Teddy Charles, Teo Macero, Eddie Shaughnessy et al. Always strangely stolid in their modrun attempting, though I thought them "weirdest" in the period. No louder bombs were ever dropped then by Eddie Shaughnessy as captured by Rudy

VanGelder's on-the-floor mikes. I once attended an amazing afternoon out-of-doors session on lawn of Lorillard mansion (early Newport years) consisting of Mingus, LaPorta, Charles, Waldron, Macero, Elvin and various sitters-in, including Brubeck at one point jamming Lady Be Good with the assembled far-outers. Wish a tape existed of that! My memory has it much more breezy and free than the ultimately resulting studio wax. None of the mathematic brew and dead air closetedness of most experimental jass. Also recalling another later Newport afternoon with the Teddy Charles Tentet (probably one of their *very* few gigs?) where the seabreezes blew all the charts off the stand but they blew great and made it anyway to surprised cheers from the beer-slogging crowd. Shaughnessy was sitting in at the last moment (regular drummer sick) and cut all the (some fairly complicated, like Brookmeyer's Show Time) charts perfectly. Little did we know he'd finally become a portly Vegas-type with loads of gold chain dangling into Doc Severinson's bell. When the hip slips . . .

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Listening again to the Bird/Diz Massey Hall Concert. Interesting how Bird makes the plastic alto sound exactly like his usual Selmer. It's all in the embouchure, plus that super-hard reed he used? Dizzy comes on like bullfight fanfare. Mingus pushing the beat with such a forward lean into the next that he actually turns the time at some points and you can hear Diz complaining. Plus he's later overdubbed his solos, so you hear him dueting with his original faint track in the background. Bud sounding like overloaded bulb wattage, post-Creedmore electro-shock clarities. And Max making those 3 against 4 balances classically bounce around the hall. Sounds like he was playing real loud, maybe to cut through and straighten the rhythm? How beauteous Tad Dameron's line on What Is This Thing Called Love (Hot House). How classic Bop lines had those sudden shocking up-turns where you'd almost fear the note would break through out and beyond any sort of sense or music. And then, just as shockingly, they turn back and glean it all back together into the stream of tune. Neuro-physiological secrets there. And how much *room* they could find in those speed tempos. Bird, even in Cherokee, sometimes sounds like he's meddling around a livingroom in easychair just reaching out casually for a light, sametime relating a long funny anecdote about how Schoenberg relates to juggling on TV. Makes me wonder just what the music *lost* post Bop? There's an assuredness in handling the weights and hefts of time that's been few and far between ever since. You can hear it though in Konitz still, where the

articulation is often in the gaps between the notes. You get it in Kerouac's longest lines.

*

An Image: Lee Konitz with String Quartet arranged by Bill Russo. I bet a lot of arrangers have wanted to cop the Lee Sound, especially in the late Forties when he had that silk pencilpoint going. String quartet allows use of individual voices, separates out the strands of what usually became a snooze in cotton wadding (Bird With Strings, etc.). Russo's linernotes show that he seems to understand the problems of such a set-up ("understandable to string musicians and yet compatible with a partial use of jazz vocabulary"), and is out front about his intent ("distinctly and purposely a non-jazz composition using superimposed jazz improvisation"). Konitz lends himself to these settings well, but they never allow any full-blowing, tend to be a mite gingerly in the transitions. I always was fond of Russo's (and Bill Holman's) arrangements for Kenton, in fact used his Sweets as theme song for an FM jazz show I used to jock in Providence late Fifties. Ah, Kenton . . . What to do with that vast WHELK! All his massed brass surely stirred (especially live) in my teen years, before I knew any better? Will he end up remembered as the Flying Dutchman of Jazz? That was an orchestra all right, too bad it was seldom a band.

*

> "He can take care of himself even though he goofs and does April in Paris from inside out as if the tune was the room he lived in and was going out at midnight with his coat on"
>
> Jack Kerouac "following Lee Konitz"
> in Visions of Cody

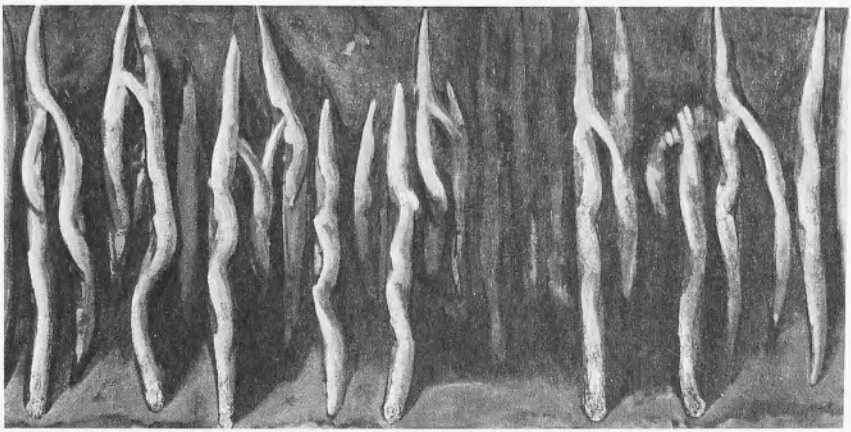
Thinking about that fascinating Konitz long-line thing, just why did he back off?, etc. And it does seem a mid-life tendency with many or most. With Konitz it seems to stem from the hassle and detachment from Tristano and K's retreat to California in early Sixties when he lived in Palo Alto (appropriately?) and took outside gigs and did a little teaching. And, as he said later, "just noodled around," took a few gigs, evidently stopped thinking of himself as a pro musician for two or three years. In fact there's always this nature of his personality that doesn't quite admit to being a working-pro player, self-effacing shy "kid" who can't completely believe in the strength of

his abilities. Along with which goes an openness, a great curiosity about all kinds of music–I once say him sitting back in the shadows blowing long held tones with LaMonte Young at the Metropolitan Museum. Also a strictness of discipline and will to study out everything he might think to play or have played. An inner model of seriousness along with a doubt that he'll ever quite make it or come up to pure level. And then there's the story (he told in interview) about how he got the call to come back and play with a Tristano group at the Half Note in 1964 and was actually afraid and delayed, goofed so he was (partly on purpose) a couple of days late for the gig. Somewhere in there he must have laid back and looked at what he'd been doing and felt that he didn't quite understand it, the long line maybe moving too fast for meditative thought?, and he could see places where he had played too many ready licks (those acrobatic trilling figures), so wanted to come down from sheer momentum heights and analyze and take it all apart, thus the broken-off shorter "implying" phrases ever after. There's his remark in another interview (1980, I think) where he says one should be able to "justify" every note one plays and not just go along with a bag of recyclable phrases. But, it could be that the converse of this is the fact that that same momentum can carry you to places/phrases you never could have gotten to otherwise. Think, too, of those Kerouac long lines where you know he didn't know where he would end up but kept the momentum going, rushing to find out. There seems a great tendency for certain musicians to worry about "mere virtuosity," and of course there *is* that danger of slickness where you end up a boring veneer-product of your own half-forgotten desires (Oscar Peterson for example). But! It seems to me there's nothing more utterly charging than that long line held up on sheer drive-of-moment taking all corners at an instancy. No doubt it takes great psycho-physical energies to maintain, tend to drain off a bit by middle-age. Though I don't think that's the main problem, more a thought problem. Konitz says he went back and listened to his recorded output, probably forming there a desire for greater succinctness, abstracted rhythm. I know, looking back at my own work (I tend to avoid), there comes a point where everything seems to be in quotes, and it all tumbles apart into weighted fragments so you begin to think how maybe you might totally consciously produce the perfect phrases etc., getting it all backasswards. Art seems to come best from getting oneself up into a state of great mental alertness compounded of sheer high momentum (no thoughts of falling) and subconscious ability to keep an amazing number of elements floating ready at the millisecond to be placed in time. Wow. Anyway, I believe in that great high *sustain*, pick-up on the fly, ability to shine and wing when in

doubt, *everything* up for grabs, a half-conscious corner-pocket genius that can never be taught to anybody completely or explained even to oneself. So, Konitz (I'm imagining) comes out of these reconsideration years with an almost wisdom-of-the-mountaintop view and makes the run for concision and meditative interruptive flow. Funny thing though is that there was a period (just out of the Kenton band when he made those dates with the Mulligan quartet, 1953) when he had the concision *and* the momentum too! I still can't believe how that fantastic jumping-ahead-of-the-barlines thing he had going so seamlessly then, sometimes finishing with the next chord a bar or two before that chord came up, never got picked up on or developed, even by him. In the gaps between his leaps, where most listening musicians must've gulped and wondered if it'd all fall apart, you can hear ghost echoes of all kinds of long lines twisting in and through, almost like those Bach violin sonatas where he's working with phantom counterlines. No doubt Konitz came out of the Kenton brassworks with greater strength of sound (he even says this somewhere, though the LennieBirds were putting him down for joining Stan at all), and certainly his tone was never more amazing, a shine as if amber were one of the heavy metals. I wonder if that phrasal bar-jumping came at all out of a consideration of Mulligan's tendency toward a two-beatish 4/4. Did that open holes for him to dodge around in and play with the meter? Then in 1954 (the Storeyville album live tracks, plus that Pennsylvania Avenue track on the Timespan album) he still had the long line going perfectly. Some impossible lengths woven into forward slings on These Foolish Things. A high-pressure fluidity of line, the one that Kerouac said inspired him to write like Konitz plays. Ceaseless sinuosities and carvings of space, riding the line onwards 'round any possible corner, hearingman's reach. The very impossibility of it all making a vacuum that must be entered. Talk about passion! Ah, the poems that could be written . . .

Ross Neher

Five Drawings and Paintings

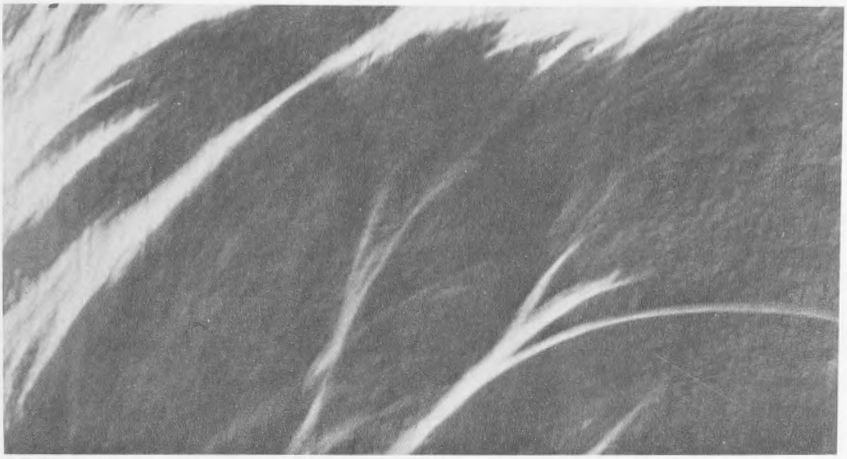


NATURE MORTE

Oil / Arches Paper / 24" x 48" / 1981

BURDEN

Oil / Linen / 48" x 72" / 1983

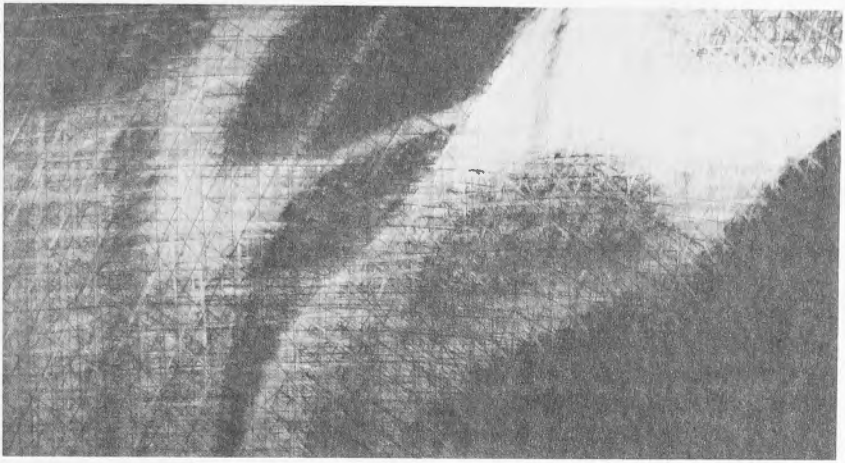


LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #41

Pencil / Arches Paper / 26" x 41" / 1983

LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #40

Pencil / Arches Paper / 26" x 41" / 1983



LIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS #48
Pencil / Paper / 26" x 41" / 1985

JOHN YAU

Light and Dark – The Art of Ross Neher

Ross Neher is not interested in representing nature's objects, and yet his drawings and paintings are a celebration of Nature. There are no views from a window, moonlit skies, or glistening fields. Rather than depicting such scenes, the artist discovers the possibilities inherent in a highly defined approach to drawing and painting. In both bodies of work, the composition evolves out of a process of addition and subtraction, assertion and revision.

In the drawings, areas are delineated with both a pencil and an eraser. Something is rubbed in, and something or some part or layer is rubbed off. Varying densities of light and dark begin defining themselves. These densities can shift, break apart, or cut through each other. On one hand, the drawings convey a barely contained field of energy. On the other hand, they suggest a mood of intense stillness, some remembered event. The space is ambiguous, while the interplay of areas is made up of rhythmic shifts ranging from the smooth to the staccato.

The primary concern behind these works is with the palpable presence of light. In the drawings, the viewer doesn't define the areas as figural representations, but sees them as fields of force. The light doesn't define shapes or reflects surfaces. Instead, it hovers between being present and dissolving. Consequently, Neher's accomplishment can be understood as the transformation of an empirically based syntax into a mode capable of embodying highly charged fields of transition. A visionary impulse, at once sensual and deprived, has been reached through self-reflexive, formally derived means.

In the paintings, light emanates from the layered depths of the insistently physical surface. The areas of color are laid down with a brush and then scraped away with a palette knife. As the surface builds up, like an oyster shell, the accretions become luminous. In the recent paintings, areas predominate, while in the paintings from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, highly mediated brushstrokes are the predominant feature. By concentrating on the interplay of areas, the artist has evolved a space that is far more ambiguous than before. Negative and positive shapes exchange roles, causing the composition to shift. At the same time, it should be pointed out that

this ambiguity is achieved without the artist relying on the relationships of interlocking shapes, as in Cubist composition. Light, dark, tonal shifts, and color are given major roles.

Although a visionary impulse is present in all of the work, I think it is wrong to define Ross Neher as an artist with a pantheistic view of nature. The work is too self-consciously rooted in its formal means to allow that kind of embrace to exist. Isolation and deprivation rule, rather than a sense of communion. The work may be informed by a visionary impulse, but the artist demands empirical proof. Everything that is reached for depends on the means. If Cubism overtook the world of appearances, then Neher's work can be seen as a philosophical extension of that historic breakthrough. In his case, the means must now be made to overtake Nature's invisible forces.

JEROME ROTHENBERG

First Gematria

ALL

or enough.

THE BAT

His yellow
angel.

THE BORDER (1)

A hundred.

THE BORDER (2)

Alone.

EYES

A hole
& an amethyst.

EVENING

Evil.

A FLAG

Living, raw
garments of

IN THE GARDEN

The sea.

GEMATRIA

Your feet.

GOD (1)

A flame.

GOD (2)

A terror.

A HOOK

One part
linen.

THE MAIDEN (1)

Stretched out
& ready.

THE MAIDEN (2)

Compasses
night

TO THE MOON (1)

The shore
a small matter.

TO THE MOON (2)

Witnesses
below.

THE NEEDY

shall judge.

IN THE SADDLE

Red, ruddy
nuts.

SALT (1)

A flood.

SALT (2)

Like the stars.

SALT (3)

Dreaming.

THE SINNERS

mingled.

IN SODOM (1)

A garden.
A wall.

IN SODOM (2)

At what time
shall we come?

THESE

Those

IN THE [AMERICAN] TREE

for Ron Silliman

(1)

Dark.
Damsel.
Dan.

(2)

The glorious
anger.

WAILING

A brick
in my mouth.

WITH US

Against us.

JEROME McGANN

The Loss of Poetry

> What are those golden builders doing?
> —William Blake

> At no time does a fortune serve to *shelter its owner from need*. On the contrary, it functionally remains–as does its possessor–*at the mercy of a need for limitless loss*.
> —Georges Bataille

In the beginning of his prose *Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810) Blake wrote that "Plato confutes himself" in saying, through Socrates, that "Poets & Prophets do not Know or Understand what they write or Utter." Blake meant that Plato had a knowledge and an understanding of the things he wrote and uttered. What distinguishes any "inferior Kind" of art from any superior kind is precisely the level of knowledge or understanding possessed by the poet.[1]

To Blake, Plato's remark is a most "Pernicious Falsehood," an "Error" (as he would also call it) consequent upon the special character–the minute particulars–of Plato's own knowledge, or truth. The execution of Plato's art is simultaneously a revelation of its peculiar forms of error and of truth alike. Indeed, this execution–an event which takes place repeatedly throughout the (now so-called) "reception history" of every work of art–is the perpetual Last Judgment which poetry brings into the world, and most immediately in relation to itself.

Blake's *Vision* is an explanation of the meaning of his picture by the same title. The picture represents his special understanding that the known world is an artistic and visionary reality. A meta-commentary on the practice of poetry in general, both Visions appear to tell the whole truth. In fact, however, Blake's work is subject to the errors of its special truths just as much as Plato's work. Blake knows this–he even admits as much in his prose text[2]–but of course his admission does not redeem his visionary work from all its errors. On the contrary in fact. Blake, for example, would never see the "error" in his theory and representation of the emanations. Nor is this error a merely localized limitation of his work; it affects every

aspect of his art, and can properly be seen–as it has been through recent feminist imaginations–as a "Pernicious Falsehood." In the same way, Blake's Christianity–a similar ideological deformation –introduced into his work a whole network of other, equally pernicious falsehoods.

In "the Productions of Genius," then, there is a necessary co-presence of truth and error (one form of which we now call blindness and insight). To Blake, this reciprocal structure was a consequence of the material and temporal conditions within which all art is produced and reproduced. These conditions presented a recurrent problem for Blake, who continually shifted between a celebration of material reality and a denigration of its illusory and impermanent forms. A famous passage at the conclusion of his prose *Vision* declares that "Mental Things are alone Real; what is Called Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place <it> is in Fallacy. . . . Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought?"[3] But of course one might answer that Corporeal Existence is the imagination of Genius–of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Lucretius as much as of Epicurus and Newton. And of course Blake would agree, though he would want to add–this is the burden of much of his work–that such Genius is infected with "Bad Art," the errors of corporeal vision, the ratios of Aristotle.

> Some People flatter themselves that there will be No Last Judgment & that Bad Art will be adopted & mixed with Good Art. . . . I will not flatter them Error is Created Truth is Eternal. Error, or Creation, will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it I assert for my Self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of me.[4]

But in reality what Blake here calls "Bad Art" is always and necessarily married to what he calls "Good Art." The Last Judgment which he himself declares to be the foundation of all artistic practice is a reciprocal event involving both a disappearance and an appearance. Furthermore, if error is created, then how are we to judge the (mortal, artistic) creations of Blake himself–his works, which he himself called creations? His own *Vision of the Last Judgment?* In fact these works judge themselves and call out for further judgment; in fact, they are creations brought forth in and through their own truths and errors.

Blake is a crucial figure in the history of western poetry because he was one of the first to undermine the canons of poetic tradition. In

his work the criteria for judging good art and bad art are radically destabilized. It is not merely that he epitomizes the collapse of the authority of inherited wisdom, and the emergence of the authority of the individual imagination. More critically, Blake's work proposes a dynamic of art which, by undermining its own pretensions to authority and truth, forces one to regard all aspects of the experience in terms of the laws of change and transformation. This takes place because Blake's work no longer leaves any room for the traditional distinction between the ideal and the real, or worlds of permanence and worlds of change. Blake *says* that all reality is mental, but his work *shows* that this "mentality" comprehends a body of highly materialized and particular work. In fact these works are not static "things" at all, they are dynamic events in the field of human experience–more deeds of language and art than representation of things (whether "ideal" or "real"). Blake's term for "outward Creation" *properly conceived* is "Action" because he understands creation as something which takes place or is carried out. And being an event, creation is in continual flux and transformation.

This departure represented by Blake's work is graphically expressed in his imagination of the figure of Los, the giant form of poetic vision and practice as it operates in the world of time and space. One might expect Los to embody a set of unequivocal values and nonproblematic deeds, but this is far from being the case. Los is repeatedly involved in mistakes, errors, blindnesses of many kinds. Furthermore, the work of Los is regularly figured in terms of furnaces because Blake insists that this work–the actual practice of the various arts of imagination–is fundamentally, *eternally* an act of destruction, decreation, removal. That work produces–more accurately, that work *is*–the various cities and buildings of Los and of his many artificers: in fact, the cities and buildings of Loss (for such is the meaning in Blake's wordplay) all of which are bound for what Blake called "Eternal Death" and the perpetual unbuilding that accompanies a transformational experience.

II

The historical importance of Blake's work must also be emphasized. Poetry throughout the past two hundred years has been produced under the sign of those profound contradictions epitomized in Blake's work. As a consequence, our poetry has forced us to read the entire literary archive in the same unstable framework, to think hitherto unimaginable thoughts: for example, that Satan is not merely the hero of *Paradise Lost* but the moral superior of that poem's

god; or–in Byron's twisted tale–that the murder Cain is the victim crucified on the cross, on the dialectic, of righteousness and its offspring, sin.

Byronic heroes and gothic villains now seem relatively commonplace, like Blake's and Shelley's Romantic reading of Milton's epic. They are the familiar faces of poetry's recent preoccupation with the unfamiliar. That preoccupation, however, has not grown less intense with the passing of Romanticism. On the contrary, in fact; for as our disciplines of positive knowledge and technical control have advanced, our poetry has represented that accumulating world as a field of increasingly acute emergencies. Information is amassed and scientific technique acquires greater precision, yet in our correspondent poetic representations we observe the scandal of the dark reciprocals: long shadows of the unconscious and the nonconscious, everything we do not wish to know and much that we are completely unaware of. While hegemonic societies and their spokesmen look to gather and preserve the best that has been known and thought in the world, poetry increasingly returns from those quests with ruined fortunes, troubled reflections, and threatening looks.

And this is why we read and study poetic works: to acquire that creativity which is a function of their critical resources. The texts themselves multiply insufficiencies precisely in their passage through history, where they are subjected to repeated attempts to bring what is dark in them into the light. But the more we know about them the more silent they become; and their silence grows from their speech, ever more articulated and detailed, ever more defined and extended. All discourse is part of that labyrinth, but poetical discourse epitomizes it because poetry imagines complete worlds rather than partial or abstract structures. Yet poetry only approaches its completion via what Georges Bataille has called "the principle of insufficiency" and "the principle of loss." The former is expressed in the following aphorism: "The sufficiency of each being is endlessly contested by that of every other;" and the latter by the observation that "loss must be as great as possible in order for [human activity] to take on its true meaning."[4] In poems, insufficiency and loss are increased paradoxically, by their accumulation of forms and details that appear substantial and significant. To the degree that poems are forms of representation, they constitute, Bataille says, "vain efforts . . . to create pathways permitting the endless reattainment of that which flees."[5]

Considered merely as representation, then, or as "virtual reality," poetry is a dead loss; and this is true, Bataille argues, even when poetry gives its allegiance to the heterological:

> Poetry at first glance seems to remain valuable as a method of mental projection (in that it appears to accede to an entirely heterogeneous world). But it is only too easy to see that it is hardly less debased than religion. It has almost always been at the mercy of the great historical systems of appropriation. And insofar as it can be developed autonomously, this autonomy leads it onto the path of a total poetic conception of the world, which ends at any one of a number of aesthetic homogeneities. The practical unreality of the heterogeneous elements it sets in motion is, in fact, an indispensable condition for the continuation of heterogeneity: starting from the moment when this unreality immediately constitutes itself as a superior reality, whose mission is to eliminate (or degrade) inferior vulgar reality, poetry is reduced to playing the role of the standard of things. . . .[6]

But when poetry is understood (and practiced) as a social activity, as an agenting form, Bataille's critique of its "practical unreality" loses its force. As a particular play or structure of language, poems will at most be conceived, and deployed, as those Buildings of Loss we might well call "self-consuming artifacts." But read for that they are–instances of a kind of social practice carried out through determinate material forms and institutions, and at particular places and times by many different people–poems emerge as the Buildings of Los[s].

Blake was among the first to understand this contradictory form of all poetical work. His conception of the poetical, however, cannot mean for us what it meant for him. Because his ideas were developed in a Christian framework and along a Romantic salient, he saw in poetry and "the human imagination" the vehicle for a literal redemption of the world. On the contrary, what poetry after Blake essays is the *descent* of all the gods and their spilled religions–or rather, their fall from the coasts of light. What one may aspire to imagine, therefore, is a world without redeemers, a world where redemption is as much at a loss as are all the other human things.

Poetry, that is to say, must not be imagined as occupying a world elsewhere. The impulse to move "anywhere out of the world," to enter a "poetic" space redeemed from time and the agencies of loss, is simply one of the buildings of Los[s] erected in a certain, by now familiar, vacant lot. Poems, therefore, should not be conceived as representations; they are *acts* of representation. Their forms are no more permanent than the forms of the gods, and they are to be found, like all the gods, in those human worlds where they are made and unmade repeatedly.

In our day poems are typically placed in the hands of academicians, who characteristically work to preserve them, or themselves, from ruin. Consequently poems are delivered into others' hands, they generally appear under various idealized forms: forms of permanence, of abstraction, or objectivity. This is the death of the poetical event, but it becomes as well a fruitless death only when we do not register that institutional death deconstructively, as that loss that it is. And beyond the critique of deconstruction stands the poetical event itself–Blake's moment of "Eternal Death"–when all that is unique and particular, all that is begotten, born, and dies, dance their Lucretian transformations.

Poems are not mirrors and they are not lamps, they are social acts–readings and writings of a kind which promote, deploy, and finally celebrate those processes of loss which make up the very essence of human living. In this sense poetry is best understood within the nexus of its many intersecting histories: political and social histories, of course, but also the histories of productive institutions, ecclesiastical histories, the histories of scholarship and education, even the histories of ideas. All of these histories, being as they are multiple and transformational, are at a loss, so far as the forms of human activity are concerned, including poetical activity; and within each of those historical frames we may glimpse, if we try, an indeterminate flux of conflicted and competing possibilities.

More than any other type of discourse, poetry works to preserve our experience of these many forms of loss. Moving into the field of the poem, we come to endure its losses as our own. Initially–such is our mistaken prejudice about time–those losses may be consigned to the past and located in limbos of regret and nostalgia. But in fact loss is a universal and amoral experience falling to the just and the unjust alike. Furthermore, losses are not the exclusive privilege of the past. If we say "the present is fleeting," we know that our futures disappear just as surely and just as swiftly. Losses are measured out uniformly across the field of temporality.

Yet among all these ruinations our moral interests move carefully about, looking for some to preserve in our selective and tributary memories, and overlooking, ignoring, or mistaking the import of the others. Because this pattern is what Wittgenstein would call a "form of life," it is as well a way of reading and writing. Poetry is itself produced in this mode–it has, we say, its ideologies–but only with a significant difference. If poetry commits itself to totalization, its own frames of time inevitably show that it can never achieve the commensurability it may imagine. If you produce an interpretation of a poetical text, a "translation" of it, the new form of the text will be able to judge the old only as it opens itself to judgment in its turn; and these judgments can come from any quarter or

direction. What comes "later," for example, may be judged by what comes "earlier;" and since both must be, in any case, multiplied and unstable forms, poetry always gets carried out in the form of losses and incommensurates.

This is the eventuality of poetry–not its structure, but its fate; and such an eventuality explains why Bataille associated the poetic event with revolution. For Bataille the experience of perfect loss is the experience of "time released from all bonds; it is pure change."[7] Such a conception projects loss as a *catastrophic* event, the image and splendour of a world where everything hovers equally on the brink of the fully possible and the utterly impossible–for good and ill alike.

This does not mean, however, that all of poetry's possibilities and impossibilities are available to anyone at any time. The larger field of history within which poetry operates sets limits to its practical operations. In the United States today, for example, most poetry is carried out not in a revolutionary but in an imperialist mode; and even the poetry committed to revolution–the "reading" of Frederic Jameson, the "writing" of Ron Silliman–is executed within the limits set for it by American imperialism, simply because the larger historical field (America) has an imperialist and not a revolutionary character. Fortunately, this "American history" is neither global nor commensurate with itself. On the one hand, it operates withing the reciprocal framework of the "second world"–equally threatening, equally imperialist–and the alternative framework of the "third," where the forms of change and catastrophe remain, for good and ill alike, real possibilities. On the other, its hegemony cannot even master the field of its own immediate dominion (its traditions and its current practices). There is a Third World which poetry finds even within the borders of America itself. There one glimpses those Buildings of Los which empty the sky of the buildings of the empire state.

Footnotes

1 *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, Newly Revised Edition by David V. Erdman, with a commentary by Harold Bloom (Berkeley, Ca., 1982), 554.

2 See *Ibid.* 563.

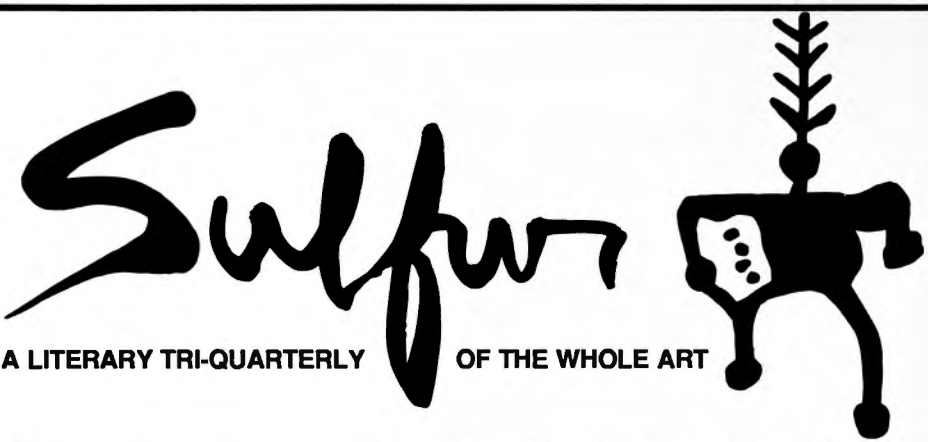
3 *Ibid.* 565.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-1939*, ed. with an Introduction by Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, 1985), 172, 118, 241.

6 *Ibid*, 97.

7 *Ibid.* 134.



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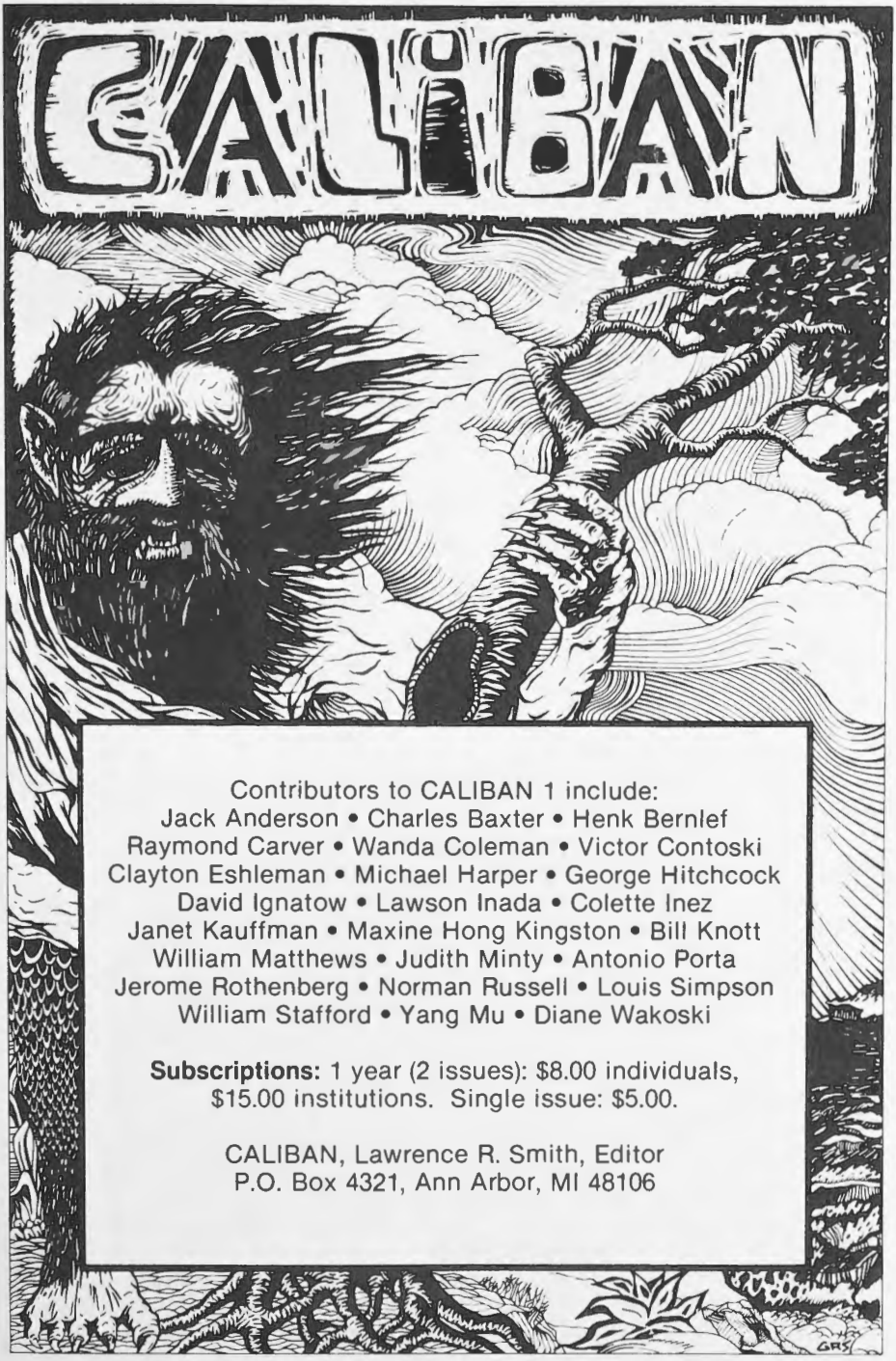

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